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Kathleen L. Spencer

The "Monstrous Regiment": Mythologies of *The Other* in British Fantastic Fiction 1880-1920 (part I)

In general, it is the non-psychological novel that offers the richest opportunities for psychological elucidation. . . . An exciting narrative that is apparently quite devoid of psychological intentions is just what interests the psychologist most of all. Such a tale is constructed against a background of unspoken psychological assumptions, and the more unconscious the author is of them, the more the background reveals itself in unalloyed purity to the discerning eye.

C. G. Jung, *Collected Works XIII*

In *Marxism and Literature*, Raymond Williams remarks that "no generation speaks quite the same language as its predecessors"; the continuities of language—grammar, vocabulary, syntax—often obscure fundamental changes in what Williams calls *structures of feeling*. The term suggests something less formal than ideology or world-view; "we are talking about characteristic elements of impulse, restraint and tone, specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feeling against thought, but thought as feeling and feeling as thought; practical consciousness of a present kind, in a linking and interrelated continuity" (131-2). However, precisely because of the similarities of language—and in direct proportion to the degree of similarity—these changes in "structures of feeling" can be very difficult to identify. We might read the words but, without even realizing it, miss the significance they had for their original audience.

However, Jung's comment above suggests the first part of a strategy for reading the changes; we can focus on relatively unsophisticated texts, texts with no psychological "intentions," so that the unspoken assumptions which constitute the structures of feeling will reveal themselves more readily to the discerning eye of the critic. Fortunately for those of us interested in late Victorian England, the "romance revival" of the 1880s created an extensive collection of such "non-psychological" novels. The adventure tale and the romance, emphasizing action and sensation rather than Jamesian complexities of character, provide an ideal hunting ground for those "affective elements of consciousness and relationships" Williams refers to.

One of the most striking features of these late Victorian and Edwardian romances as a set is the prominence of the fantastic. "The fantastic," alas, is one of those chameleon terms which has been used so many different ways by different critics that it must always be explained. Forthwith, Spencer's formulation: as a genre the fantastic is characterized by "a textual confrontation of two models of reality" (Zgorzeleksi 198). That is, the novel begins in the realistic mode, but at some point an element intrudes which, by the laws of the ordinary mimetic world, is impossible: a vampire walks at high noon in Piccadilly Circus in A. D. 1897; a beautiful woman turns out to be 2000 years old; by means of a chemical potion, a man splits himself into two separate personalities. The intruding element signals to both readers and characters that indeed this is no longer the ordinary world as we know

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In this issue

Kathleen L. Spencer looks at vampires and other "others" in fantastic fiction
Patrick D. Murphy gives the back of his hand to the critics of Joanna Russ's criticism
Michael Swanwick—blurber extraordinaire
Jim Young explores the dawn of modern sf
John M. Ford interprets dingbats
As well as the usual and unusual reviews, letters, reading lists, and what-nots

Patrick D. Murphy

The Left Hand of the Pilgrim: Joanna Russ's Contributions to Criticism

This paper was originally delivered at the 20th Annual Science Fiction Research Association Meeting, Oxford, Ohio, June 1989, and was written in response to the controversy generated during the previous year by the selection of Joanna Russ to be the recipient of the 1988 Pilgrim Award. Neil Barron called her selection "sexism at its most regrettable" in the October 1988 issue of the *SFRA Newsletter* and the debate continued through the June 1989 issue with the Pilgrim Award Committee responding to an attack by Everett Ruessler, who even questioned the selection of the Award judges.

If Bob Collins, in the letter widely distributed earlier this year promoting Marshall Tymn for the Pilgrim Award, is correct in his remarks about various Pilgrims, most SFRA members know little about the quantity or quality of Joanna Russ's critical writings. This, of course, provides no excuse or justification for the blind and virulent condemnation of the committee's awarding the Pilgrim to Russ, or for that matter to any other writer, because particular individuals are decidedly ignorant about that of which they speak. But then, perhaps we need to define two different kinds of ignorance, circumstantial and willful. Russ herself has demonstrated a singular recognition of this difference and has addressed herself to both kinds of ignorance, both in her fiction and in her critical essays. No honest individual who claims the right to make blanket evaluations about Russ can justify ignorance of her fiction. Even though many of her short stories remain uncollected, the bulk of her creative writing has been collected and is currently in print. But with the exception of two books, *How to Suppress Women's Writing* and *Magic Mommas, Trembling Sisters, Puritans and Pervers*, both available in paperback, Russ's critical writing remains accessible only through Interlibrary Loan. So far I have only been able to obtain 18 essays and five interviews in addition to the two books. But quantity isn't really the issue, since some Pilgrims have been awarded on the merits of virtually a single critical text. Rather, has Russ's criticism contributed to the development of the field? Yes, it has done that and

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—Willis Harman

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more. Russ is one of the extremely few contemporary writers whose critical work is alluded to by mainstream critics. And invariably that contact has resulted in those critics gaining a new awareness about writers.

Nineteen-Sixty-Six: Russ, 29 years old with only about eight stories in print, and perhaps a few of those better forgotten, gets *Epoch* at Cornell University to publish "The Night at My Fire," but the editorial board wants an explanation. She dutifully responds with "The Writer Explains," in which she sets out some of the very features of postmodern fantasy that will be recognized by a number of our own more astute professional critics one and two decades later. Commenting on her piece, "Furniture Store," she notes that "I want you both to believe and not to believe, to see that these things are subjective and yet to take them as real. . . . Our own lives don't present themselves to us in categories, but in a continuous process of which no part is any more real than any other" (103). Compare this, for instance, with Lance Olsen's thumbnail sketch, "Overture: What Was Postmodernism?", bearing in mind that "The Night at My Fire," like *Slaughterhouse Five*, is concerned not with a character, but a postmodern "state of mind" (105). One also finds in this essay the distinction that such structuralists as Todorov and Kristeva were about to make between fictional and poetic language in terms of images: "Is the furniture store a real place or a metaphor," asks Russ. "It is not a real place. But it is an experience, rather than a metaphor" (102). She also indicates that her work will, along with that of numerous other feminist writers, shift attention in sf from "hard" to "soft," and will blur the demarcations between science fiction and fantasy, a subject on which she has much more to say in other essays.

In 1968, the year *Placid* on *Paradise* appeared, Russ demonstrated the degree of self-consciousness involved in the feminism of her fiction by means of a speech, "Alien Monsters," delivered at the Philadelphia SF Convention and twice reprinted. The following sentences from the adapted version of that speech, retitled "The He-Man Ethos in Science Fiction" and published in 1972, should give some flavor of her approach:

It is a real scandal that in a field like ours, which is supposed to be free to extrapolate into the future, so liberated from prejudice and popular nonsense, so rational and so daring, both readers and writers still cling to an illusion, a freak, a myth, a Paleolithic caricature, of what a real man is (226).

Certainly, it is also a scandal that some critics as well as writers have not yet noticed that such depictions are caricatures and illusions, and that gender politics has always been practiced through sf writing. And that this state of affairs does not just concern gender stereotypes, that it is political and has implications for race, class and empire, as well as gender, was well recognized by Russ: "It's bad enough not to be able to think clearly about sexuality, but it's worse (much worse, given the kind of absolute, ultimate power science fiction writers are fond of writing about) when you can't think clearly about power. We look at real political or moral situations and instead of seeing what's there, we see our favorite myths of Penis, Strength, and Gun" (227). No doubt some men in the audience immediately looked down when that trad followed Russ's use of the word "myth."

Also in this essay Russ makes explicit the need for sf both to shift attention from gadgets to people and to expand attention to encompass both:

I would like to see science fiction exhibit, in its projections of human relations, the daring, the wildness, and the extravagant imagination that have already been applied to gadgetry of every description. So many science-fiction stories (like other stories, of course) operate on assumptions about people and values that would hardly be adequate to the social relations of a bunch of flatworms (230).

Here Russ imagines a beachhead where writers had already begun "to boldly go" in small numbers, but which would soon become a veritable resort. She also announces the end of sf's adolescence.

In the following year in the pages of *Extrapolation*, Russ renewed

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PLUS

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her attack on the arrested development and prolonged adolescence of sf, but this time instead of exposing the "he-man ethos," she critiques "Dream Literature" by means of examples from Poe, Lindsay, C. S. Lewis, van Vogt, and David Reiss. What is wrong with such writing? "Dream Literature, no matter how skillful, is anti-poetic and anti-philosophic. Ideas, too, must be kept unrealized, lest the lotus-stance be disturbed, and emotions are all the better if you can't recognize them or pin them down" (13). In other words, Russ recognizes that for sf to attain maturity there must be attention to both form and content, style and theme. Russ's imperative that "art must express the inexpressible or cease to exist" really expresses her wish for other writers to turn away from the non-literature that matches the trashy covers their publishers continue to put on pocket books (13).

In line with this imperative, Russ in 1971 devoted three essays to the issue of genre. The brief "Genre" recognizes that "the genre must die before it can become real art" (195). What this means, according to Russ, is that "until now the best writing in science fiction has been done by people outside the field" (184), a rather damning evaluation. Concomitant with it is Russ's claim that Bradbury is the most widely read of writers of the time, "read even by people who don't read science fiction," precisely because "whatever constrictions his writing is subject to are not the constrictions of genre" (184). And yet despite this trenchant recognition of the problems that result from encouraging writers "to risk the gulag" by writing within conventions proscribed retrospectively by editors with the complicity of critics, how many of our own colleagues continue to attempt to repress and dismiss the formally innovative and the philosophically and politically sophisticated writing within our field by appeals to anally retentive concepts of what is sf and what is not? How many works discussed here this weekend would be proscribed if some *primadonnas* (not *primadonnas*) had their way? How much energy has been expended in the pages of *Science-Fiction Studies* arguing over which works should be allowed to grace those pages and which should not? Such concerns reveal that the critical eye is fixed to the wrong end of the telescope. Russ notes in "The Wearing Out of Genre Materials" that "no particular artistic element in fiction can survive forever, but the speculation, the free-

wheeling free thinking we prize in science fiction may turn out to be too general a principle to be tied to particular scenes or particular emotional high points or particular plot devices. . . . Put things might be different together with any kind of scientific method and you have science fiction" (54). Clearly, Russ does not believe that "scientific method" means only the engineering problems of "dillithium crystals."

In "The Image of Women in Science Fiction," Russ focuses more narrowly on the problems within sf writing of the depiction of women in terms of "particular scenes," "particular plot devices," and characterization. Even writers, such as Frederik Pohl, who display all sorts of other sophistications in their "intelligent, literate science fiction" reveal that "speculation about social institutions and individual psychology has always lagged far behind speculation about technology" (81). As in the case of Pohl's *Age of the Pussyfoot*, the far future is "the American middle class with a little window dressing" (81). Russ concludes that "there are plenty of images of women in science fiction. There are hardly any women" (91), a conclusion that paves the way for her next major essay, and the one undoubtedly quoted the most frequently inside and outside of speculative fiction circles, "What Can a Heroine Do? Or, Why Women Can't Write." In this essay Russ draws the connections between the stereotypes and conventions not just of sf as a genre, but masculinist writing in general, and the resulting second-class citizenship of women writers. "Our literature," she argues, "is not about women. It is not about women and men equally. It is by and about men" (5). And as a result, "women cannot write—using the old myths" (20). And in order to get new myths, a key task she sees for sf, "we must know—that our traditional gender roles will not persist for the future, as long as the future is not a second Stone Age" (20). Russ does not raise here the question: how much sf and how many of our writers and critics still today actually suffer from a longing for just such an age?

In the field of the modern gothic, Russ concludes that everyone in it suffers from such a malady (in her essay "Somebody's Trying to Kill Me and I Think It's My Husband"). She focuses here on the effects on the female reader. For one, invariably "another woman" exists as a threat equal to if not greater than the "Super-Male," à la *Jane Eyre*.

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But more importantly, the modern gothic serves as one of the most reactionary examples of the limitations of "what can a heroine do?" (685), all of which reduce themselves to "The Heroine's suffering is the principle action of the story because it is the only action she can perform" (686). While few sf novels would qualify as modern gothics given the delimitation of this suffering as the principal action of the story, how many nevertheless can qualify as having modern gothic women as the only depictions of female characters, whether written by women or men? Here Russ seems more concerned with reaching the readers of popular literature rather than the writers and critics. The modern gothic is hopeless rubbish, but if sf is to break out of adolescence, its readers must demand and choose the mature works among those being written each year. But women, along with other readers in general, are only likely to turn from gothics to sf if the focus shifts from hard to soft, a trend that Russ both lauded and encouraged in her essay, "What If . . . ? Literature." As she notes, "by the 1960s science fiction had become a novelist's field and more than ever writers were shifting from the 'hard' or exact sciences to the 'soft' sciences (e.g. ethnology, psychology, sociology)," with the positive result that "science fiction was moving closer to the concerns of all literature" (200). This does not mean that sf is being corrupted by "mainstream" contaminants, but that "Damon Knight's phrase 'sense of wonder' describes a satisfaction that can be found nowadays almost solely in science fiction, an awe and exaltation that is very close to religious experience" (200).

But having educated writers and readers to the need for such shifts in attention, maturation, and sense of wonder, Russ turned her attention in 1975, the year that *The Female Man* finally metamorphosed from manuscript to published novel, to the problem of academic criticism. "Towards an Aesthetic of Science Fiction" begins by chiding academic critics not only for finding "themselves imprisoned by habitual (and unreflecting) condescension in dealing with this particular genre," but also "quite often their critical tools, however finely honed, are simply not applicable to a body of work that . . . is fundamentally a drastically different form of literary art" (112). Building on the work of Suvin, Lem, and Delany, Russ emphasizes that the standard of plausibility that needs to be applied to sf must be based on "disciplines ranging from mathematics (which is formally empty) through the 'hard' sciences (physics, astronomy, chemistry) all the way to disciplines which as yet exist only in the descriptive or speculative stage (history, for example, or political theory)" (112).

Russ then proceeds to propose the following: "science fiction, like much medieval literature, is *didactic*," "science fiction's emphasis is always on *phenomena*;" "science fiction is not only didactic, but very often awed, worshipful, and religious in tone" (113). With these propositions in mind, Russ concludes that "contemporary literary criticism," as of the early 1970s, "is not the ideal tool for dealing with science fiction that is explicitly, deliberately, and baldly didactic" (113). Perhaps, then, that is the problem with those critics who find themselves unable to analyze or even cope with feminist didacticism in contemporary sf. Not having recognized previous didacticism because its messages agreed with their values, they cannot handle didacticism that challenges those same values. It is comparable to journalists trying to cover the moon landings by riding to the scene in a hot air balloon. Every remark that Russ makes in this essay about the difficulties of critics coping with sf can be read as an allegory of the difficulty of traditional critics, such as Neil Barron, Everett Bleiler, and James Gunn, trying to cope with feminism. Their tools just don't seem to measure up. Or, as Russ puts it by means of another example after having noted the relationship of sf with postmodern literature in terms of a change of sensibility resulting from "tendencies in our own, post-industrial culture," Russ goes on to state that "criticism of science fiction cannot possibly look like the criticism we are used to. It will—perforce—employ an aesthetic in which the elegances, rigor, and systematic coherence of explicit ideas is of great importance" (117). How few of us have realized such a goal, or even recognized the need for it. If Russ's contributions to criticism have been slight up to this point, I think that has more to do with a lack of attention on our part than on a lack of writing on hers. But, in addition, her remarks also point to the utter inexcusability of dismissals of political, sociological and psychological speculations in sf, such as gender dynamics,

because the critics are only prepared to handle "hard" science speculations.

A few years down the road Russ's criticism in *Science-Fiction Studies* became less general and more specifically and explicitly focused on gender dynamics, women's oppression, and feminism. "Sf and Technology as Mystification" bridges the change. Beginning as a discussion about problems of sf criticism and production in general, contrasting *Star Wars* and *Star Trek*, the essay crossed over to the issue of how technophilia avoids the problems of social dynamics through "thingification of people and social relations".

Some years ago I read a technophilic book in which the author speculated delightfully about how many sex organs human beings might acquire via surgery. . . . He was even "daring" enough (his own word) to propose that men be given female organs and women male organs. . . . Not to believe that the misunderstandings which occur between men and women occur because men's penises and women's clitorises are shaped differently or because fucking feels different for each sex is the grossest kind of mystification. It is certainly clear to me (and any other feminist) that men's and women's misunderstandings of one another . . . are carefully cultivated in the service of sex-caste positions in a very nasty hierarchy (258).

Russ, then, in 1980 in "*Amor Vincit Fovisimam: The Battle of the Sexes in Science Fiction*" particularizes these general remarks through a review of 10 male-authored gender-role-reversal stories, which are then compared with a James Tiptree story, "Mama Come Home." Russ refers to additional works in her conclusion, which ends: "The Flasher books perceive conflicts between the sexes as private and opt for a magical solution via a mystified biology. The feminist utopias see such conflict as a public, class conflict, so the solutions advocated are economic, social and political" (14). Though left unsaid, Russ's comments, weighed against her earlier critical remarks about sf in terms of scientific plausibility, clearly suggest which works ought to be evaluated as sophisticated sf and which as pulp, John Berger's reputation, for example, notwithstanding.

Russ followed up on these remarks the next year with "Recent Feminist Utopias," written for Marleen Barr's *Future Females: A Critical Anthology*. This essay is probably one better known by sf critics than most of the others here, so I won't reprise its points except for the one that contradicts much of the analysis performed on utopias and dystopias by academic critics. Russ observes here that "utopias are not embodiments of universal human values, but are reactive; that is, they supply in fiction what their authors believe society . . . and/or women, lack in the here-and-now" (81).

I want to conclude, since I am out of time, with brief remarks about Russ's two critical books, *How To Suppress Women's Writing* and *Magic Mommas, Trembling Sisters, Puritans & Porners*. These works are not about sf; these works have everything to do with sf, Russ's career, and the future of women writing. Let me reverse order, however, since *How To Suppress . . .* has a better quote for me to appropriate for the close of this paper. In *Magic Mommas . . .*, Russ begins by basing her analyses of patriarchy, compulsory heterosexuality, and pornography on the work of Dale Spender. She states that "Spender's formulation of feminist theory isn't final either, of course, but I'm going to propose as the primary demand of patriarchy what she chooses from Matilda Joselyn Gage (1873) that women's resources be available, non-reciprocally and without pay, to men" (10). Feminist sf criticism, then, needs to take this recognition and apply it to the worlds imagined and re-presented throughout both the creative and the critical works and evaluate them in terms of whether they encourage or discourage the continuation of such non-reciprocity. And we here need to recognize that resistance to Russ's writing as literature, to her receiving the Pilgrim Award, and to the work of other feminists in sf is based precisely on a desire—conscious or unconscious, willful or ignorant—to maintain such non-reciprocity.

But it is certainly not enough merely to expose this state of affairs, or even to condemn without offering new ways of writing, new ways of criticizing, and examples of reciprocal behavior. Russ closes the

"Epilogue" of *How To Suppress Women's Writing*, which by the way begins with a science fictional "Prologue" about "glotolog," with these words:

Well, as in cells and sprouts, growth occurs only at the edges of something. From the peripheries, as Klein says. But even to see the peripheries, it seems, you have to be on them, or by an act of re-vision, place yourself there. Refining and strengthening the judgments you already have will get you

nowhere. You must break set. It's either that or remain at the center. The dead, dead center.

I've been trying to finish this monster for 13 ms. pages and it won't. Clearly it's not finished.
You finish it (132).

Ditto for this paper. ▶

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The History of Luminous Motion by Scott Bradfield

New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989; 274 pp.; \$17.95 cloth

reviewed by Gordon Van Gelder

Scott Bradfield's first novel, *The History of Luminous Motion*, has just a few scant inklings of the supernatural, primarily it is a literary first-person narrative about a boy growing up in California. I think it is the most horrifying book I've read this year.

Bradfield is certainly no stranger to genre fiction, having published many stories in *Inkblot*, *Luminous Motion* is tapped from the same vein as stories such as "The Darling" and "Unmistakably the Finest," a California mine of pain, brutality, and empty lives. Young Phillip lives with his single mother in central California in a very close relationship. Their home is her car, traveling around the San Fernando Valley. Phillip reads textbooks and philosophy and ponders life in Encino, Monterey, Stockton. He and his mother try to settle down, and fail. They thrive, they suffer, and Phillip's father returns.

For an eight-year-old, Phillip scares me badly, not for what he does (and he commits some violent acts) but for what he is. Phillip is more than precocious, he is life in the fast lane. He can't get his kicks through drugs. Nor sex. Nor crime. His only hope, it seems, lies in motion: if he keeps moving, he'll be okay. If he stops, forget it. And this frightens me because it's not just Phillip, it's our whole country, our entire century, scores of years that began with Henry Ford and haven't stopped racing. The end of it all (is there an end to it all?) disturbs me, just as in this novel . . . but that comes later.

The other people in Phillip's world are also unsettling. Phillip's young friends get no thrills, the adults have no joy, and the people who give any appearances of being content—notably "Pedro," a man with

whom Phillip's mother settles for a while—die ugly deaths. The adults lack that razor sadness that make Bradfield's stories tremendous—that bitter emptiness beneath the flat affect of Bradfield's prose—but their joylessness still haunts me. The suffering of Phillip's mother, dreaming of a better life, lying in bed alone, hangs over the book like smog; Phillip's well-intentioned father brings and feels only pain, and even Officer Henrietta (you'll have to read it to meet Officer Henrietta) seems listless and sad. "Times like this," says Phillip, trying to explain the history of luminous motion, "I felt sorry for Officer Henrietta" (p. 262).

All this pain and sorrow seems to come from the adults' inability to control the world. *Luminous Motion* consists of forces motion, light, sound and gravity, mass, chemistry. Forces that rid people of the illusion that they can control their lives. Only Pedro—[forget his real name]—seems happy as he constructs things out of wood; happy, that is, until Phillip teaches him that he too cannot control his life. Phillip even uses Pedro's woodworking tools for this lesson. This is scary.

Let me be more specific: This is the scariest passage in the book, the future Phillip envisions after his criminal ordeals.

I had a future now, as firm and incontrovertible as my house and my family. I would complete grammar school, junior high, high school. Perhaps I would attend USC or UCLA, and earn my degree in law, medicine or journalism. I would marry a lovely, patient woman who would bear me

no more than three lovely children. I would acquire a good job, my own big house, and two cars in a two-car garage. A Pontiac and a Volvo. My wife and I would send the kids to summer camp every year, to give us a little time to be together. On Christmas, we would take everybody to the house of the man and woman who had raised me in Bel Air. We would drink and sing Christmas carols. Every other year or so either I or my wife would have an affair with someone, usually someone I worked with or my wife met at one of the various regional political and charity functions she often attended. We would consider calling everything off. But then we would start to grow more anxious and uncertain the further and further we grew apart from one another. We would begin to feel ourselves verging on vast unlabeled places that seemed to open up out of the earth under our feet. We would come to tearful and sudden reconciliations that grew quickly more formal and sensible as succeeding weeks passed. Our children would grow up. Just like me, they would raise families of their own. (pp. 269-270)

I loathe this. It scares the hell out of me. This picture of life is brutish and virtually meaningless and I can't stand the thought that we should

Michael Swanwick "Ode to Be a Blurb!"

Oh, all right.

Some events are so perfectly obscure, so determinedly minor, that they fairly scream out for detailed explanation. You are right to demand such of me. I can but obey.

Michael Bishop's "Oh, to Be a Blurb!" (shame on you, if you missed his reference to Philip K. Dick) appeared in the Winter, 1980 issue of *Thrust*. Which article, written in mock high realism and drenched with Bishop's characteristic sly wit, said almost everything good that has ever been written about the delicate art of blurring. A minor literary form, admittedly. But wait until it is your turn. You discover then that there is no help: no how-to books, no workshops, no famous role models. You are on your own.

Enter Mr. Bishop, and the article which has made him the acknowledged patron saint of blurbers. Amidst much humorous banter he made the thoughtful observation that a blurb is a sort of haiku. That is to say, it is the poetic distillation of one's impressions of the book within strict physical constraints. Quoth the man himself: "Finally, you see, a blurb demands the precision of a haiku, the conviction of a vow, the eloquence and maybe even the enigmatic resonance of a koan, and the pizzazz of a cola spot."

Most useful to the potential practitioner was his elucidation of what he dubbed the Berrocal Approach, after the combinatorial puzzle-sculptures of Spanish artist Miguel Berrocal. As Roger Zelazny explained it to him: "What I have done is to compose a general statement of some of my feelings about your work, from which your editor might select whatever he deems most appropriate. I've written it so that it might be easily broken apart, or used in its entirety." Within a seamless paragraphic whole, each sentence (and indeed some clauses) may be employed as a stand-alone blurb.

Finally, it was implicit in the article that the ideal blurb is aimed at the book's true audience. It is, for example, worse than useless to write, "For a good mindless romp through intergalactic space you could do no better than Samuel Delany's *Dhalgren*!" No. You want to wave in the book's natural readers, those who will be grateful you brought it to their attention, while gently urging the other boxes to pass on by.

(Need I mention that the intelligent blurbster only blurbs books he likes? The sole physical reward involved is to be sent more of the same for potential eotera. Praise one *Star Trek* book, and you will never get the damned things out of your mail. *Verb sap.*)

Since first reading Bishop's article, I have myself graced a number of books with my own reverent versicles (those of you muttering the epithet of "quote whore" are politely asked to leave the room), always keeping in mind the Master's guidelines. Finally, inevitably, things

be doomed to repeat the mistakes of our predecessors, to follow someone else's script for life, with no hope of escaping, no hope of breaking the pattern. My worst horror scenarios are not comprised of blood and gore and splatery effects, they consist of an impenetrable fear of being unable to change anything, a claustrophobic horror of *knowing what the horror is and being unable to change it*. Phillip sees it, too, and that's why *Luminous Motion* scares me.

Fortunately, the end of the novel holds some hope of redemption, some chance for escape, in the same way that the experimental form of this novel offers hope by striving for originality. Unfortunately, the novel lacks some undefined edge, it may be that Philip eclipses all the other characters, denying them their shining sorrow. It may be that the forces—mass, light, etc.—are often muddled and lack the vivid definition they need; one of the points of the book is that life isn't sharp and clearly defined, but this detracts from the book somehow. Or it may be simply that eight-year-old Phillip's precocity isn't entirely consistent, that for all his beautiful narration and his insightful philosophizing his emotional core never rings true. In any event, *The History of Luminous Motion* is vividly horrifying, and I look forward to that which Scott Bradford will create in the future. Works such as his give me hope that we will in fact learn from past mistakes, avoid repeating them, make the world better. ▶

came full circle

In 1988, I was sent bound galleys for Michael Bishop's *Unicorn Mountains*. It was a gentle, sensitive contemporary fantasy about unicorns dying of AIDS. In short, a blurbster's nightmare. The direct approach—"If only if You Love Unicorns"—would have them walking out in droves midway through the action, angrily resolved (to their loss) never the read any of Bishop's work again. "CAUTION: Contains Scenes Involving Mythical Animals With Large Running Sores," on the other hand, conveys nothing of the humanity, the lightness and—yes—joy, of the book (it's irrelevant to speculate what the editor would be thinking on receipt of this effort, we are artists here, not market-watching vulgaritarians.) Nor would "Dark, Squamous and De-pressing" quite do. No book in which it is explained that the afterlife is played out on UHF television can be entirely satisfying to the mind that requires its literature Squamous.

What to do? Oh, what to do?

To cut short the artificial buildup of suspense, I did finally pen a Berrocal Approach squib, nicely calculated to ring in the rubes while quietly brushing aside the squeamish, employing the Natural Audience Strategy, not my best but a fine piece of craftsmanship all around anyway. To wit: "*Unicorn Mountains* is fantasy for adults, full of the dangerous stuff of life, death and love. Bishop writes with toughness and compassion and, most miraculous of all, with great joy."

I sent it off.

But the affair felt unfinished. I moped about the house for a day or so, and then at last dug the rough draft of the blurb from the wastebasket. I went to the bookshelf to check the syllabified such a word is to be, as I maintain it should not, allowed on decent people's lips, which turned out to be 5-7-5. I smoothed the paper, and recast the blurb:

Fantasy grown up

Life, death, love—dangerous stuff

Yet there is great joy

In its original form, the blurb appeared on the Arbor House edition, the last of three on its back cover, but did not make it onto the Bantam Spectrum "Spectra Special Edition" paperback. Currently available for \$4.95 (in Canada \$5.95) at your finer bookstores everywhere.

en hommage à Myles na gCopalain

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The "Monstrous Regiment"

Continued from page 1

it, but a world in which different laws prevail—in which "reality" is significantly altered.

Two elements are essential for the characteristic *frisson* of the fantastic first, the impossible event must genuinely be happening (not a dream or hallucination, or a mistake or a deliberate trick); and second, the tone of the narrative emphasizes wonder, disbelief, and (usually) horror. The characters (as well as readers identifying with the characters) are all aware that the laws of "reality" have been violated, and react accordingly. The normal response from characters facing such fantastic occurrences is: "This cannot be happening—but it is!"

The fantastic as a genre is by definition relatively modern. For one thing, realism must be a well-established (fictional) convention before we can conventionalize the violation of it. Thus I would argue that the Gothic of the late eighteenth century (some of it) is the first fantastic fiction; but there is another reason for the characteristic modernity of the genre. As a model of "the real world" becomes increasingly rationalist and materialist—that is, as the model of "reality" grows ever more tightly circumscribed—violating the laws of the mimetic world becomes progressively easier and, for that very reason, more powerful, more meaningful, whether as radical protest against the narrowness of the model or a violation in the service of ultimate reaffirmation.

In any case, the dramatic increase in the number of fantastic texts in the 1880s and '90s suggests that the genre answers some felt need for contemporary audiences, that it reflects and helps articulate something in the changing structures of feeling. My object is to explore what that need might be; but that is a very complex question. We cannot start there, but must work up to it with some preliminary questions. For example, what kinds of fantastic tales do the Victorians tell? That is, what sorts of violations of "reality" do they imagine, and repeatedly produce and consume? Another question: what do these violations of "reality" suggest about the anxieties and concerns of the readers? What do other kinds of texts in the period, non-fictional texts, indicate about the subjects appearing, explicitly or implicitly, in the tales of the fantastic?

To deal with the first question first: what sort of fantastic tales do the Victorians tell? As I read these tales, one subject leaps out at me—see: A lot of them are about sex. That is scarcely news: after all, we've made jokes about Victorian prudery for generations—about ladies having "limbs" instead of legs, and about skirts on pianos, and little paper ruffles on lamb chops; and when Steven Marcus pointed out the complementary Victorian obsessions with prostitutes and pornography, we rather gleefully concluded that they were hypocrites as well as prudes. As Sherlock Holmes would say, finding sex in these stories is merely "elementary."

However, the really curious thing is that, while we all agree that these stories are about sex, we can't seem to agree about what point they are making on the subject. Take *Dracula*, for example: there are as many readings of Stoker's 1897 novel as there are critics. It is quite clear that, in this novel, sexuality is threatening, but whose sexuality threatens whom is a subject of lively debate.

The traditional view has it that the story is about male sexuality threatening passive female innocence, a view certainly reinforced by the film versions of the novel. On the other hand, the newer feminist readings argue instead that, for Stoker, rampant female sexuality is the

true danger. Lucy's violent death in the tomb, they argue, is clear proof that the novel validates the brutal suppression of female sexuality.

Alternatively, Christopher Craft maintains that the sexual tension in the novel is essentially homoerotic, although consistently displaced onto women: "only through women may men touch," he says, offering as evidence of homoerotic desire Dracula's reaction to Jonathan Harker, Lucy's four transfusions which bind her four male doctors together in a sort of marriage bond, and Mina and Jonathan's child which bears names of all the young men and which Craft somehow sees as metaphorically the child of Lucy and her four lovers (111). Finally, Burton Hatlen, offering a Marxist reading, insists that all the sex in the book is sadomasochistic, that there is no "clean" sexuality which can constitute an alternative to the "unclean" sexuality of the Count (87).

This cacophony might be merely another example of the normal "Blind Men and the Elephant" game that critics always end up playing with literary texts, in which what we find depends very much upon where we're looking. However, there is so much support in the novel for each of these readings—the dangers of male sexuality, the dangers of female sexuality, the homoerotic, and the sadomasochistic—that privileging any of them is merely arbitrary; and that is indeed a curious fact, because our traditional model of Victorian attitudes toward sexuality would, I believe, tend to see these four readings as mutually exclusive. The problem then becomes, how do we explain this radical ambiguity of sexuality in *Dracula*? We need a model of Victorian sexual codes in which the simultaneous presence of these apparently diverse attitudes toward sexuality can be made coherent.

Notice I say we need a better model of Victorian sexual codes, not a better psychological analysis of Stoker, to explain the text's anomalies. That is because *Dracula* is not an isolated phenomenon, but is part of a lively and quite distinct literary/cultural movement, not only of other tales about vampires, but of other fantastic novels and stories on related themes. Whatever it is that *Dracula* is saying about sex, it is saying not in splendid isolation but as part of a dialogue, indeed, as one voice in a chorus. We need to examine the novel from that perspective, as evidence of a cultural viewpoint, a structure of feeling, in order to determine more satisfactorily what it is saying.

I do not claim a mastery of the entire body of fantastic fiction in Britain in this period, but in my dissertation, "The Urban Gothic in British Fantastic Fiction 1880-1930" (UCLA 1987), I discuss 70 novels and 26 short stories in certain categories of the fantastic. Add to these the body of vampire tales from Polidori on—and the 18th century Gothic, the sensation novel of the 1860s, and early detective stories for comparison—and the result is a reasonably broad sampling of Victorian popular fiction. When I look over this body of fiction, set in the context of other popular genres of the time, I am most struck not by the uniqueness of *Dracula*'s thematic concerns, but by their ubiquity.

One of the primary issues in fantastic fiction, and the one on which this paper will concentrate, is the relationship between the protagonist(s) and the supernatural. Here I find three broad categories. The first, what we might call "supernatural attack," is psychologically the least complex. The victim tends to be "innocent," that is, often chosen more or less at random, and his/her reaction to the attack is quite uncomplicated—simple terror, or terror combined with straightforward resistance. Examples would include John Polidori's *The Vampyre* (1819), the first vampire tale in English, based on a fragment by Polidori's erstwhile friend, Lord Byron, and indeed initially attributed to Byron; Rhymers's *Wormy the Vampire*, published serially as a "penny dreadful" from 1845 to 1847; Conan Doyle's "Lot No. 249" (1894) about an Egyptian mummy revived by an Oxford student-magician and sent out to do murder on the magician's enemies; a handful of more or less interesting (mostly less) vampire and werewolf stories with German villains produced during and just after World War I; and Sax Rohmer's *Brood of the Witch-Queen* (1918), another tale of villainous Egyptian magic invading modern England.

The second category is not only larger (within my sample, at least) but also, I believe, of much greater significance. These are stories of *fascination* the victims' characteristic response to the supernatural threat is a mixture of fear and attraction, disgust and desire. They are, in other words, the target of a kind of seduction which they are only partly able to resist, and are thus to one degree or another implicated

¹This description differs considerably from Todorov's definition of the fantastic, which emphasizes the hesitation of the characters and/or readers about whether the impossible event is really happening or should be explained in psychological terms as dream or madness, and so on. For a fuller explanation of my model of the fantastic (based on the work of Andrzej Żgórski), see my article, "Victorian Urban Gothic: The First Modern Fantastic Fiction" in *Intersections*, ed. George Slusser and Eric Rabkin (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987), 87-97.

²I would argue that, even for religious believers, most of their interactions with the world are based on this materialist model. The direct intervention of a Deity in human lives is still miraculous and thus a violation of the *norm*, if not of the laws of nature.

in their own danger or destruction. Works in this category would include such familiar titles as Haggard's *She* (1887), George du Maurier's *Trilby* (1894), and *Dracula* (1897), as well as lesser-known works like Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1871), about a lesbian vampire; Ross Campbell Præd's *Affinities: A Romance of Today* (1885), in which a young heiress is hypnotized into a fatal marriage with a character resembling a satanic Oscar Wilde; Conan Doyle's *The Parasite* (1894), in which a female mesmerist tries to seduce a young Cambridge physicist with nearly deadly results; and Somerset Maugham's *The Magician* (1907), another story of "mesmeric marriage" featuring a character based loosely on the infamous Aleister Crowley. [A complete working bibliography will appear at the end of this article—eds.]

To see how it works, let's look at the language of fascination, starting with *She*. When Leo Vincey first sees Ayesha's uncovered face, Holly describes his reaction this way:

I saw him struggle—I saw him even told to fly; but her eyes drew him more strongly than iron bounds, and the magic of her beauty and concentrated will and passion entered into him and overpowered him—ay, even there, in the presence of the body of the woman who had loved him well enough to die for him (Ch. XX, p. 173).

Staring over poor Ustane's body, Leo kisses Ayesha passionately, and "plights his troth." But later, alone with Holly, he bitterly curses his own weakness.

I am a degraded brute, but I cannot resist this . . . awful sorceress. I know I shall do the same tomorrow; I know that I am in her power for always; if I never saw her again I should think of no other woman during all my life; I must follow her as a needle follows a magnet, I would not go away if I might; I could not leave her, my legs would not carry me, but my mind is still clear enough, and in my mind I hate her—at least, I think so. It is all so horrible . . . I am sold into bondage, old fellow, and she will take my soul as the price of herself (Ch. XXI, p. 182).

Jonathan Harker, during his stay in Dracula's castle, experiences the same mixture of revulsion and attraction in the face of ominous and powerful beauty. Confronted with the three mysterious women in the moonlit room, he admits, "I felt in my heart a wicked, burning desire that they would kiss me with those red lips" (Ch. III, p. 47).

The girl went on her knees and bent over me, simply glowing. There was a deliberate voluptuousness which was both thrilling and repulsive, and as she arched her neck she actually licked her lips like an animal, till I could see in the moonlight the moisture shining on the scarlet lips and on the red tongue as it lapped the sharp white teeth. Lower and lower went her head as the lips went below the range of my mouth and seemed to fasten on my throat. . . . I could feel the soft, shivering touch of the lips on the super-sensitive skin of my throat, and the hard dents of two sharp teeth, just touching and pausing there. I closed my eyes in languorous ecstasy and waited—waited with beating heart (48).

The erotic charge in this passage is absolutely stunning and, for Stoker, very close to the surface. Here the emphasis is clearly more on the attraction than the repulsion, but later Jonathan realizes at last what they are, and he cries, ". . . those awful women. Faugh! Mina is a woman, and there is nought in common. They are devils of the Pit" (Ch. IV, p. 61).

A final series of examples, from Maugham's *The Magician* (1904), makes even more explicit that the emotional charge in these encounters comes from aroused sexuality. To summarize briefly: Margaret Dauncey, an Englishwoman studying art in Paris, is engaged to Arthur Burden, a young doctor with whom she is very much in love. By chance she and her fiancé encounter the mysterious Oliver Haddo, who claims (rightly, as it develops) to be a magician. Haddo is immense: not only tall, over six feet, but also with an imposing paunch,

despite which he is very graceful in his movements, and can be charming when he chooses. His ego, however, is as imposing as his paunch, and his wit equal to both, though he uses it with as much cruelty as dexterity. Margaret's initial response to him is quite negative. He looks to her like "a very wicked, sensual priest," and she suddenly shudders violently, affected with "an uncontrollable dislike" (Ch. 3, p. 33).

When Arthur mortally offends Haddo, the magician decides to take Margaret from him for revenge. After a few weeks of his wooing, she is terrified of him,

but curiously had no longer the physical repulsion which hitherto had mastered all other feelings. Although she repeated to herself that she wanted never to see him again, Margaret could scarcely resist an overwhelming desire to go to him. Her will had been taken over by him, and she was an automaton. She struggled, like a bird in the fowler's net . . . but at the bottom of her heart she was dimly conscious that she did not want to resist (Ch. 9, pp. 99-100).

Later in Haddo's apartment she tries to leave but is unable; he does not physically restrain her, but she cannot walk out the open door, though she wants to. He talks to her endlessly, and the talk enflames her with a strange passion.

Then, on a sudden, she knew what the passion was that consumed her. With a quick movement, his eyes more than ever strangely staring, he took her in his arms, and he kissed her lips. She surrendered herself to him voluptuously. Her whole body burned with the ecstasy of his embrace.

"I think I love you," she said hoarsely. . . . She did not feel ashamed (102).

After this she feels every day the "uncontrollable desire" to go to him, which she tries to talk herself out of, but at the same time knows she does not really want to be prevented from going.

There was always that violent hunger of the soul which called her to him, and the only happy hours she had were those spent in his company. Day after day she felt that complete ecstasy when he took her in his huge arms, and loosed her with his heavy, sensual lips. But the ecstasy was extraordinarily mingled with loathing, and her physical attraction was allied with physical abhorrence (103).

In text after text, the same pattern repeats: ecstasy and loathing, attraction and abhorrence. The victim struggles, but irresistibly drawn by the power of the fantastic creature (and, as is perfectly clear, by the power of his/her own sexual desires which that powerful other has stimulated) and at the same time repelled and horrified. The central experience for these characters, then, is loss of will. They are unable to exercise conscious control over their own behavior. Their minds make one choice, and their bodies another, diametrically opposite—their bodies, responding to the will of the fantastic creature—and always, to their infinite horror, the body—the Other—wins. It is more than loss of will; it is loss of identity, obeying the will of another whose purpose (often clear even to the victim) is to destroy the victim's independent will.

The situation gets even more complex in the third category of tale. Here, the central character suffers an internal split of some sort, so that the supernatural attack on the conscious will is now coming not from an external source but from inside the protagonist himself (I use the pronoun advisedly: all the characters I know of in this category are male). *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) is the earliest and best-known of these tales. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) a less perfect example of the type. However, three later works, all fairly obscure, seem to me even more interesting than their famous predecessors.

In 1906, Algonon Blackwood published a collection of related tales called *John Silence, Physician Extraordinaire*, about the cases of a man we might call a psychic doctor: that is, Silence is a skilled medical doctor, but more importantly is a specialist in certain kinds of occult problems, hauntings for example. Two of the Silence stories fit into this

third category of psychic division, "Ancient Sorceries," in which memories of a past life as a Satan worshiper unexpectedly haunt a modern-day Englishman, and "The Camp of the Dog," one of the most curious werewolf stories I have ever encountered.

A small camping expedition—Maloney, his daughter Joan, Silence's assistant Hubbard, and a young Canadian student named Peter Sangree who is recovering from a lengthy illness—is troubled by the howling, and then by the attacks, of a gigantic blood or wolf in the night; only no wolf could possibly be on the small sea island where they are camped: there is no fresh water, and therefore no food. The solution: the wolf is Peter Sangree, or rather, his astral body. As Silence (called in by Hubbard) explains, under certain conditions (occult training, particular drugs, or sometimes illnesses) the Double or astral body has the power to project itself and become visible to others, and sometimes this projection takes other forms than human, forms "determined by the dominating thought and wish of the owner."

And there are some persons so constituted . . . that the fluidic body in them is not loosely associated with the physical, persons of poor health as a rule, yet often of strong desires and passions, and in these persons it is easy for the Double to dissociate itself during deep sleep from their system, and, driven forth by some consuming desire, to assume an animal form and seek fulfillment of that desire (363).

Peter Sangree's desire is—Joan. He has fallen deeply in love with her, but is unable to acknowledge this during his conscious waking life. However, he is such a heavy sleeper that his efforts to suppress and control his feelings fail at night, and the wolf runs free. There is one other factor contributing to the form of Sangree's astral projection: he

Read This

Recently read and recommended by

K. W. Jeter:

Ruth Rendell is on the verge of becoming A Big Thing in this country, as she already has in England, so perhaps I'll finally be able to leave off bending people's ears about how I consider her to be the finest living writer in the English language, bar none. Two caveats: (1) I make a distinction between *writers* and *persons who write* to show what *clever little bastards they are*. Rendell is a *writer*, I'm afraid that a great many readers of *The New York Review of SF* prefer to read *persons who write* to show what *clever little bastards they are*, and the reasons for my enthusiasm for Rendell will be lost on them. That's their loss. And (2) Rendell established her reputation in the mystery genre with a series detective named Inspector Wexford, I'm not as keen on the Wexford books as I am on the others. (And perhaps Rendell isn't, either, most of her recent production has been non-wexford.) The following are some personal favorites from her backlist:

A Judgement in Stone (1977)—The finest meditation on language and insanity since Bergman's *Persona*.

Make Death Love Me (1979)—Death and redemption, and an inverted analysis of the hostage/captor relationship, revolving around a pair of Rendell's trademark fearless criminals.

The Tree of Hands (1985)—An interesting failure; I'm not sure the two plot lines really mesh. Still, the examination of moral dilemmas centered around child abuse make it worth reading.

Master of the Moor (1982)—Locale and history, both real and imagined, and genetic craziness.

The Killing Doll (1984)—Perhaps Rendell's finest book so far. An absurd universe, where happy and unhappy consequences are distributed on a random basis to the evil and the good, the most darkly luminous final paragraph that I've ever encountered. If you don't read any other on this list, read this one.

has "an admixture of savage blood—of red Indian ancestry" (365).

Silence insists that Peter's desire, which he is entirely unconscious of expressing, is "utterly unalloyed—pure and wholesome in every sense," but in his case "the lover's desire for union [has] run wild, run savage, tearing its way out in primitive, untamed fashion." His is a desire for perfect union, "to bathe in the very heat of the blood of the one desired" (366). Clearly the excesses of the wolf must be contained somehow, but the solution is not to destroy the savage Double, for it contains most of Peter's vital energies, and without them he would be "an imbecile—an idiot." What they must do is redirect the energies in more positive channels, that is, if Joan is willing, by giving Sangree what he desires. Joan, in fact, feels as strongly about Peter as he about her, but in her conscious waking personality is not aware of her feelings. Silence hypnotizes Joan and sends her out at that unconscious form to meet the "wolf" and satisfy their mutual longing. There are complications, but the end result is that the lovers at last become consciously aware of their feelings, so that they can resolve their problem in the ordinary daily realm.

What seems to me to be so remarkable about this story is, first, the way it walks a delicate line between the fantastic and the psychological. While the text insists on the literal level of the wolf's activities, it is hard to imagine a more fitting image for Freud's id than the "poor starved beast" which emerges from Peter Sangree's body when he is unconscious, in sleep. Second, the story is, particularly for its time, astonishingly accepting of sexuality. Silence speaks of Peter's sexual hunger as perfectly natural and "unalloyed," it is his frustration that is causing the problem, and the solution lies in Joan's sharing of those natural desires. This suggests that Blackwood is one of the more advanced members of his own culture on the subject of sex.

The Undying Monster: A Tale of the Fifth Dimension (1922), by Jessie Kerruish, is also about an unconscious werewolf, but in this case the young man is not triggered into his ferocious activity by sexual passion but by an ancient family curse, a kind of hereditary mania, that comes into action only on the head of the Hammond family, and only under certain conditions which reproduce those of the original hallucination—where the victim is in a pine-wood, in starlight, and with only one human companion. When his elder brother dies in World War I, Oliver Hammond finds himself suddenly the head of the family, and the Hammond Bane once again appears after a thirty-year hiatus. He and his sister Swanbild call in Luna Barendale, a Superstitious (a cross between a "white witch" and a detective) to help solve the problem.

She finally realizes that the monster is Oliver himself in a hallucinatory state, yet young man is completely unaware of what he is doing. But this very fact suggests a cure. As Luna explains, the monster's only existence is in the Fifth Dimension—the human mind. There is no cure for hereditary madness, but there is a cure for "hereditary hallucination": she will hypnotize Oliver and make him think he is his ancestor, the victim of the original hallucination, and work out the curse there at its source. "In this way the convulsion of the brain that harbored the wolf mania will be altered and henceforth hold only a vague, complacent sense of something done with" (236). Thus not only will Oliver be cured, but the Bane will never reappear, as the fatal brain convulsion will no longer be passed down to Hammond sons.

As with "The Camp of the Dog," what is significant in this novel is the sympathy for the young man, the sense that, however deadly his actions, he is not to blame for them. Not only is the violence unintentional, the division itself—unlike the situation in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and *Dorian Gray*—is both unplanned and unconscious. Instead, for Peter Sangree and Oliver Hammond, part of their personality, part of their "self," has escaped their conscious control and is running amok. The key in each case is, by diminishing the strength of the unconscious desires or beliefs, to return the aberrant part to the control of the victim's conscious will. These two sympathetic stories suggest that the operative structure of feeling which underlay the earlier stories is beginning to change.

So, to summarize, here are the three categories of tale: supernatural attack on an unimplicated victim, fascination or compulsion by supernatural power in which the victim's unconscious aids the attacker, and psychic division, in which the fantastic attacker is part of the victim's own personality. Already there are some suggestive patterns here, but when we examine the supernatural agents involved in these tales, we gain further illumination. ▀

Raising Utopians *Running Wild* by J. G. Ballard

New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1989; \$12.95 hc, 104 pp.
reviewed by Kathryn Cramer

Payne runs the film in slow motion. Marion's brother had come to the window beside her. Boy and girl clasped hands and raised them over their heads in a gesture reminiscent of a black panther power salute.

"Look closely at this, Doctor . . ." As the smiling girl lifted her arm she pressed against the window, and her dress flared across the glass. Imprinted on the waist were two stylized tulips.

"Handprints, Doctor. They were still there when she was found at Waterloo Station, in the same blood group as her father's" (Running Wild, p. 60).

How should children be raised? In a nice neighborhood with grass and trees where there are other children of their own ages? Should they go to good schools? Should one watch educational television with them and discuss the programs with them after ward? Should one give them non-gender-specific names? Install security systems to keep them safe from harm? Help them with their home work? Give them water skis? Home computers? Video cameras? Love and encouragement? The parents of Pangbourne Village, a British suburban development five miles northwest of Reading and thirty miles west of London, did all this for their children, all this and more. *Running Wild's* Pangbourne Village was an embodiment of our contemporary parenting utopia.

The parents of Pangbourne Village were executives, doctors, psychiatrists, former professional athletes—affluent, competent, physically fit, and all in the prime of life. And on June 25, 1988 all the adults in Pangbourne Village, thirty-two people, were found brutally murdered. "All investigation into the Pangbourne Massacre confirms that not a single adult present in the estate on the morning of June 25 survived the murderous half hour which began at approximately 8:23 a. m." (p. 19). All thirteen of their children, ranging in age from eight to seventeen, were almost certainly present at the times of their parents' murders, and are now missing—presumably kidnapped or taken hostage.

Running Wild is simultaneously a detective novel, a psychological horror novel, and a dystopian political novel (although actually, by my estimate, it can't be much over 30,000 words, if that). Published as a "novel of suspense" in a flashy post-modern New Fiction style package, *Running Wild* is speculative fiction in the same sense as M. J. Engh's *Arctian*: the speculation is all in the revolution that happens offstage, before the book opens. And it is science fiction in the sense that—like many of Ballard's earlier works, for example "The Assassination of John Fitzgerald Kennedy Considered as a Downhill Motor Race"—it is told from a scientific point of view. And those New Wave Ballardian numbered paragraphs return, but in a more mature context. Although *Running Wild* is science fiction, the only events that might be construed as fantastic have already taken place before the story opens (and, in retrospect, are no more fantastic than what we read in the newspaper), so the book does not require that one read it using the reading protocols of science fiction.

Dr. Richard Grenville, Deputy Psychiatric Advisor to the Metropolitan Police, is called in to help solve the mystery of the Pangbourne Massacre. *Running Wild* is told in the form of excerpts from Grenville's forensic diaries. Grenville's narration is hardboiled—coldly clinical, and yet passionate with the tension of someone struggling to understand the incomprehensibly horrible; becoming increasingly intense as he does begin to understand, and attempts to reach some emotional accommodation with what he has understood.

The hardboiled narrative voice is straight out of Dashiell Hammett and James M. Cain. Dr. Grenville goes through a re-enactment of the crime and many other archetypal detective novel scenes. And he solves the crime, coming up with a convincing narrative of how it all

happened. In a Hammett novel, this would have been the cathartic scene: The crime solved, the criminal caught, and our ordered, though not entirely comfortable, world restored. Not here.

Grenville watches police video tapes, tours the scenes of the crimes, reads children's diaries, goes through their closets, examines the contents of their parents' safes, watches home movies, trying to piece together what has happened. And through his investigations, eight-year-old Marion Miller emerges as *Running Wild's* true central character. We see her as a little blonde girl who wears pretty dresses and has bangs that fall in her eyes. She has a doll house. We really learn very little about her, but Marion is a familiar character: she is the very picture of innocence; we feel we know her. She is little Eva from *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, or that character that Shirley Temple always played—the little girl who is too good to live when we cannot imagine as a grown-up.

The police find her hiding in a train station among some mail bags. "A ticket inspector coming on duty . . . had heard what seemed to be a cat hissing among mail bags in the skip. Trying to rescue the stray, he found the shivering and grimy form of a barely conscious child with matted blonde hair, wearing a bedraggled cotton frock and a single shoe" (p. 45). She is uninjured, but does not speak except to make the hissing noise she was making when she was found.

Grenville comes to believe that Marion helped her brother kill their father. But like a private detective in love with a *femme fatale*, Grenville is continually making excuses for little blonde Marion:

"She was only eight—at that age you enjoy being cooed to in total affection, with someone telling you what to do every moment of the day. . . . Let's go through the other material, Sargent—older and far more dangerous heads planned the Pangbourne Massacre" (p. 66).

And yet the portrait that begins to emerge of Marion is of the fallen angel, the corrupted child, like Flora in Henry James's "The Turn of the Screw," or the possessed little girls we see on the covers of grocery store horror novels. And still while Grenville defends his world view, seeing her as an innocent victim, compelled to kill her parents by the older children.

As Freud recognized, later in his career, psychoanalysis is a process involving two psychologies: the patient's and the analyst's. When one asks whose immediate emotional welfare Grenville's theorizing serves, the answer is clear. Grenville's. Marion Miller is looking out for herself and has no interest in him or his theories. And at the point when it becomes clear that the police are not interested in the possibility that the children killed their own parents, the only person to whom the theories are of any emotional utility is Grenville. This vibrates with an eerie resonance to a line from Ballard's "The Atrocity Exhibition": "Was my husband a doctor, or a patient?"

Running Wild, the psychological novel, is about Dr. Grenville's attempt to come to grips with the Pangbourne children's motivations for murdering their parents. Grenville waxes eloquent on the subject of their confinement and the pressure upon them to be happy. How the video cameras of the Pangbourne Village security system were everywhere. How all their activities were carefully planned, and selected to be of benefit to them. Grenville tries to identify with them, put himself in their shoes. He tries to construct for himself a set of circumstances under which he would do the same thing. This is the essence of speculative fiction's humanist vision.

The children had an underground newspaper fraught with deadpan irony, and almost Dadaist content—reminiscent of the children of Daniel M. Pinkwater's *Young Adult Novel* minus the merry tone. (Pinkwater and Ballard are probing the same area of adolescent alienation, but from different perspectives.) They made a documentary

about Pangbourne Village, filled with images of bland happiness; the film had a secret, underground version which was a symbolic description of the plan for the Pangbourne Massacre. These productions, in context, speak eloquently of the children's oppression—they live in a utopian community in which it is tantamount to a crime to be anything but happy. They are being loved and petted to death. Pangbourne Village, from their perspective, is a farm for children—one of the signals that it was time to kill was the opening line of George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, "Mr. Jones, of the Manor Farm, had locked the hen-houses for the night, but was too drunk to remember to shut the popholes," sent out over the children's computer network. The children's revolutionary struggle is disturbingly heroic, cast in the familiar socialist realist idiom of other twentieth century revolutions.

But Grenville's attempts to understand lead him to some of the wrong conclusions about Marion, and are, from the start doomed to failure—these children have had the best lives that modern psychiatry and social theory had to offer. But they revolted, and theirs is a specifically anti-humanist revolution. Grenville feels that these children are rebelling against parental love, a difficult theory to swallow. But if that is not the motivation behind their revolution, then their motivations are even more disconcertingly opaque. And if we assume, as Ballard seems to wish, that Pangbourne Village is a psychiatric utopia, then by definition, psychiatry is inadequate to the task, and so is the usual speculative fiction resolution—these children are truly

Other, and so our *Star Trek* humanism is not equal to the task.

In the end, we are forced to admire the competence, even brilliance, of the Pangbourne children's rebellion. Their bold plan to kill their parents and flee requires a complexity of strategy and planning that begins to resemble escapes from Auschwitz. These children have too much dignity to be either mere criminals or mental patients. They are political revolutionaries, and while we may see their lives as utopian, they disagree. Ballard forces us to balance our opinions of their situations with theirs. Who are we, after all, to decide that they must be happy, or even content? If we feel that way, who else can we be but their oppressors?

The Marion we finally come to understand, in as much as Marion can be understood, is a Joan-of-Arc figure. If these children are the best and the brightest, struggling to overcome their oppression, Marion seems an almost divine figure among them, embodying both a radiant Madonna, and a little child, as in "A little child shall lead them."

The book's detective and psychological aspects serve its dystopian message: that we cannot construct a utopia from the outside. Nowhere else have I seen this point made so convincingly. Ballard is relentless in comparing the utopia we would build for our children with George Orwell's dystopian visions in *1984* and *Animal Farm*. If it gets the notice it deserves, *Running Wild* may well be remembered as one of major political novels of our time. ▴

Abandoned in the Country of Last Things In the Country of Last Things by Paul Auster

New York: Penguin Books, 1988; \$6.95 pb; 188 pp.

reviewed by Richard Terra

I had been eyeing Paul Auster's *In the Country of Last Things* on the displays and sale tables of the local bookstores ever since it came out in hardcover in 1987. The cover art was attractive, intriguing, disturbing if you dwell on it long enough. The premise, while not original, was still keenly relevant in an era of ever-increasing urbanization.

But Auster was a writer I'd never heard of before, this slim novel looked like one of those crossover efforts by an author of previously literary/mundane/mainstream works, bravely venturing into that curiously noisy borderland between speculative literature and the so-called literary establishment. I didn't know what to make of it: most of these borderland mutants, it seems to me, are just god-awful trash, perhaps this was a hopeful monster. I let it lie until Penguin reissued it in paperback as part of their Contemporary American Fiction series.

In the *Country of Last Things* is the tale of Anna Blume, a young woman who leaves her homeland (probably Europe) and comes to "The City," an anonymous near-future metropolis in the terminal stages of political, economic and social decay. She has come in search of her brother William and one Samuel Parr, two journalists sent, as Anna says, "to get the story, and every week there was going to be another report. Historical background, human interest articles, the whole business. But we didn't get much . . . A few short dispatches and then silence" (p. 28).

Anna's tale is presented as a letter, an extended monologue directed toward an intended reader who is never explicitly identified.¹ The technique is similar to that employed by Margaret Atwood in *The Handmaid's Tale*, a point to which I'll return.

Anna herself soon becomes lost amid the decaying buildings and the rubble-filled streets. She wanders, bewildered by the city and its people. Homeless, she becomes a scavenger, making a living as an object hunter, seeking out the last few objects of value amid the rubble and debris of the urban wasteland.

The atmosphere is one of oppressive alienation from the dehumanizing influences of modern urban life. Auster expresses this

alienation with power and eloquence. His prose is clean, his description and imagery clear and sharp, at times almost hallucinatory. The book is a pleasure to read, and Auster very nearly succeeds in carrying the tale on the force of his prose alone. None of these strengths, however, can disguise what I think to be some major flaws.

When I finished *In the Country of Last Things*, I had a hard time identifying just what sort of work I had just read. The jacket blurbs (obviously) weren't any help: one reviewer likened the book to *1984*; another to both *The Pilgrim's Progress* and *The Diary of Anne Frank*. But they at least summed up the ambiguity of classifying Auster's novel. It seems to pull in two different directions: allegory on the one hand, and realistic, mimetic fiction on the other, with many of the elements of a powerful cautionary tale. This ambiguity pervades the entire novel, and ultimately undercuts its effectiveness.

It is the opening passages, in Anna's initial description of the conditions in the city, that seem closest to true allegory. Indeed, this section, comprised of the first forty pages or so of the novel, was originally published separately in *The Paris Review* some years ago, and is relatively self-contained. In a rather dream-like, plodding rhythm, Anna describes "The City," which seems to exist in isolation, its place in and connections to the rest of the world uncertain.

The government has abdicated responsibility for all but police actions to ensure the distribution of food and the collection of corpses and sewage. Half the people are homeless, yet more continue to pour into the city from the surrounding farmlands (though I could not discover any reason why they would want to . . .). "You would think," Anna writes, "that sooner or later it would all come to an end. Things fall apart and vanish, and nothing new is made. People die, and babies refuse to be born. And yet, there are always new people to replace the ones who have vanished" (p. 7).

At times Auster goes beyond simple extrapolation into pure invention: euthanasia clinics, assassination clubs, bizarre cults whose members run themselves to death or crawl upon their bellies in repentance for the sins of the world. It is here that *Last Things* seems to shade over into allegory or satire, and in this sense it closely resembles Stanislaw Lem's *Memoirs Found in a Bathtub*, a mordant, Kafkaesque satire of the bureaucratic paranoia of the military-industrial complex.

True allegory, however, employs explicit symbolism—*this stands*

¹Actually, the text is a *third person* account of a first person monologue. The first line of the novel reads: "These are the last things, she wrote." (Italics added.) The *she wrote* and other bracketing statements scattered throughout the text represent an intellectual can of worms which I refuse to open.

for *that*—to relate a specific ethical or moral point. Ambiguity clouds the opening passages of *Last Things*; one has to wonder if any of it is directly symbolic of anything, or if it is just a series of sharp, well-crafted metaphors (where *that* is only *like that*). There is nothing in Auster's images that seems strictly symbolic.

This impression is bolstered by the fact that the novel becomes even less allegorical, less metaphorical as it progresses, and becomes increasingly specific, mundane, mimetic. Despite a certain wry, dark humor, the novel also lacks the sustained sense of irony that marks explicit satire. Well, then perhaps the book is intended as a cautionary tale, an extrapolation of current trends or conditions, taken to a logical extreme.

Science fiction, fantasy and other speculative genres seem uniquely suited for the telling of broad-scale cautionary tales. Traditional tales of this sort, cast as legend, fable or pure allegory, are often intended only to alter the behavior of individuals, and so are difficult

to apply to entire societies. But tales of the past experiences of entire peoples, of whole societies, we call *history*, and these are told in an entirely different manner. The lessons are more obscure, more difficult to extract.

History also does not (theoretically) permit invention on a broad scale; even characters in historical fiction have little room to maneuver, after the social milieu in which they exist. Only in the invention of alternative or future histories, through speculative extrapolation, can this restriction against tinkering with socio-economic and political realities be overcome.

This device lies at the heart of some of the more enduring works of science fiction, among them Wells's *The Time Machine*, Orwell's 1984, Huxley's *Brave New World*, Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange* and Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (as well as all the varieties of population bomb/ecological disaster/post-nuclear holocaust tales, *ad nauseum*). This technique has long since passed into general use, even among writers whose other work has little association with fantasy *per se*, where it has been employed with varying success.

I have to admit I had trouble with Auster's extrapolation (assuming, now, that it actually is a cautionary tale). Problems, if they can be labeled as such, arise early in the story as Anna gives her description of the city. I could not really believe in this isolated metropolis in decay. It has no history, and the causes of its decline remain a total mystery throughout the novel. Logical inconsistencies abound. The transportation network has collapsed, yet the food supply is maintained. The sewage system no longer functions (it is collected by truck), yet the water system does. Half the population is homeless (p. 16), yet more continue to pour in from the countryside: how are they supported? (I am aware of conditions in present-day Calcutta, Delhi and São Paulo, but these are living cities, with functioning governments, transportation and utilities.)

But rigorous extrapolation is not necessarily required for a successful cautionary tale. What is needed is a protagonist with a thoughtful and inquisitive mind, who will explore the issues at hand, the social forces that have led to the conditions the work is warning against. Auster's creation of Anna Blume is sympathetic and well-rounded, but if *Last Things* is intended as a cautionary tale then she is perhaps not entirely appropriate for the role she plays in the novel.

Anna's story (as opposed to that of the city) really begins when, after living in the streets for some indeterminate time following her arrival, she is taken in by Isabel, an aged object hunter, and her husband Ferdinand, a withdrawn and bitter misanthrope. For a time Anna shares their meager lives, and it is from Isabel that Anna learns much of all she is ever to learn about The City. Eventually, Isabel's health begins to fail, and the old couple becomes dependent on Anna and the scanty income she brings in as an object hunter. Tensions and resentment build between the three in the small, dingy flat they share until one night, when Ferdinand attempts to rape her, Anna nearly strangles him. She flees the apartment while Ferdinand lies gasping on the floor, and does not return for many hours.

The next morning, Ferdinand is dead. Anna suspects that Isabel has murdered him while she was out of the flat, but cannot be sure. The two women live on alone, but Isabel's health continues to deteriorate, until she cannot walk, cannot talk, cannot eat and finally cannot breathe. But Anna stays with her, helpless but faithful, until the end.

Very shortly afterward, Anna is back out on the streets. "I had been in the city for more than a year now, and nothing had happened. There was some money in my pocket, but I had no job, no place to live. After all the ups and downs, I was right back where I had started" (p. 85). It is at this point that Anna's flaws (or those in Auster's creation of her as character) begin to become apparent. Up until this point in the narrative I had been still holding open the option for an allegorical interpretation—Isabel and Ferdinand; that has a nice symbolic ring, associated with the discovery of new worlds. But Anna's belief that "nothing has happened" collapses this possibility, and by the end of the novel I had to wonder whether she could ever discover anything new.

Anna is an introverted and largely self-centered woman; she has difficulty extending her caring and concern beyond herself and those immediately around her. This is a common enough trait, but Anna fails

***The Last Days of Christ the Vampire* by J. G. Eccarius**

San Diego: Ill Publishing, 1988. \$5.95 pb; 180 pp.
reviewed by Greg Cox

So there's these teenage radicals and would-be anarchists in Providence who, jokingly, come up with the idea that Jesus is a vampire. After all, he did rise from the dead, and he does tend to turn his followers into brain-dead zombies. The kids decide to promote this theory, via flyers and graffiti, in hopes of decreasing church membership, ending apartheid in South Africa, getting the contras out of Nicaragua, protecting a woman's right to an abortion, and to otherwise bring down Christianity and Capitalism as we know them.

As it turns out, however, Christ, who looks like "a semitic version of Ronald Reagan," really is a vampire, and pretty soon our valiant band of revolutionaries, led by a 27-year-old "Professor," are being pursued by Vatican death squads and Inate Southern "Batbits." All of which raises the question of what is more improbable: that the mighty undead alliance of Church and State would actually feel this threatened by a bunch of spunky graffiti artists, or that Christ the Vampire and his minions would prove so miserably ineffective at squashing the anti-Christ campaign? It's tempting to point out, in fact, that *Amazing* recently ran another, somewhat more reverential Jesus-as-vampire story and I haven't noticed any riots in the streets as a result. (Then again, *Amazing* has been discontinued . . . but, no, that way madness lies.)

Sigh. Although this heavy-handed, apparently self-published novel is notable only as a curiosity, I can't quite bring myself to ridicule it as gleefully as I'd hoped. Its heart and politics are largely in the right place, and one almost envies the sort of youthful fervor that can suggest that spraypainting CHRIST IS A VAMPIRE on a few, or even several, church walls will quickly lead to civil war, martial law, and a civilian assault on the Pentagon. For what it's worth then, there are flashes of imagination here, and even one reasonably spooky chapter (featuring Cardinal Vlad of the Inquisition). The rest, alas, is tatty, disjointed, and unintentionally silly—as when the Red Cross is implicated in the international Christian conspiracy for soliciting blood donations "all out of proportion to how much it's needed."

I suspect that J. G. Eccarius (whomever he/she/they may be) would like nothing better than to be vilified throughout the land, and possibly become the next Salman Rushdie. As a million-dollar bounty is beyond my budget, I hope J. G. will settle for a bad review. ▶

to realize this, and to rise above it. She is unwilling to accept her humanity, when confronted with it during her struggle with Ferdinand, she reacts with horror: "I felt nothing but disgust, nothing but outrage and bitterness . . . but now I understood that I was no better than Ferdinand, no better than anyone else" (p. 66).

Anna does not probe the roots of this reaction; she rarely probes beneath the surface of anything. She does not attempt to discover the sources of Ferdinand's bitter isolation, his hatred and his misanthropy. She does not understand that his progressive dehumanization will dehumanize her as well. She does not try to discover what it is that can drive another woman to murder the man she has loved and lived with all her life, does not try to understand his death:

... we never talked about Ferdinand—not about his life, not about his death, not about anything. I found it hard to believe that Isabel had mustered the strength or courage to kill him, but that was the only explanation that made sense to me. There were many times when I was tempted to ask her about that night, but I could never bring myself to do it (p. 76).

Anna's lack of curiosity goes well beyond her immediate experiences. She lives in almost total ignorance of her surroundings, and does not seek to discover how the City came to its present state, how it continues to maintain itself. The existence of the government, the police, the Resurrection Agents who deal with the object hunters and the booty they collect, the black marketeers and the organized gangsters, all imply a socio-political order which Anna never probes. Austen's vague, ambiguous dystopia remains inconsistent and incomplete, and so loses much of its potential impact for the reader. *Last Things* contains few details of the dystopia portrayed, none of the carefully observed details and events that provide so much of the richness and meaning in works such as *1984* or *The Handmaid's Tale*. This lack of inquiry on Anna's part leaves Austen's novel unnecessarily impoverished.

Anna also fails to learn from her experiences—not a desirable trait in the central character of either an allegory or a cautionary tale. Worse yet, she makes no effort to resist the erosion of her experience: "Nothing lasts, you see, not even the thoughts inside you. And you mustn't waste time looking for them. Once a thing is gone, that is the end of it" (p. 2).

And: "It's not just that things vanish—but once they vanish, the memory of them vanishes as well . . . and unless you make a constant effort to summon up the things that are gone, they will quickly be lost to you forever . . . Memory is not an act of will, after all" (p. 87). This is Anna's mistake, and one of her crucial flaws: she has no will to remember the past, and it is lost to her.

This loss of the past is a collective loss, for The City has no history. Even Anna realizes how terrible this is: "That is perhaps the greatest problem of all. Life as we know it has ended, and yet no one is able to grasp what has taken its place . . . you want to survive, to adapt . . . to accomplish this seems to entail killing off all those things that once made you think of yourself as human" (p. 20). But Anna offers no solution to this slow process of dehumanization; indeed, she comes to accept it as a fact of life.

Sadly, Anna resigns herself to these conditions, to living in ignorance and isolation. Like the other people of The City, she wanders through the grim streets alone. Communication with her fellows has become nearly impossible; words lose their meanings through "a slow but inflexible process of erosion."

This loss of the past and the ability to communicate, in combination with a resignation to the oppressive conditions of the present, spells disaster: "Without knowledge, one can neither hope nor despair. The best one can do is doubt, and under the circumstances doubt is a great blessing" (p. 39). Anna is forced to doubt everything and everybody, all becomes uncertain and any hope for the future vanishes.

Anna, with all her character flaws, is thus representative of the people who have brought the city to its present decrepit state, and initially I thought perhaps this was Austen's purpose. Anna's progressive hardening and isolation provides a powerful example of the agonized uncertainty caused by the erosion of her self-knowledge and

her understanding of the past and the loss of any hope for the future present an equally powerful cautionary lesson. The question, I suppose, is whether Anna actually serves as the vehicle for presenting that lesson: do her experiences change her?

Even at this point in the novel, Anna is not totally lost. Though young and naïve, and becoming progressively cynical and self-centered, she reveals some capacity for quiet moral outrage: some of Austen's most moving passages include Anna's reactions to the plight of The City's homeless, to the attempts of the poor and the destitute to preserve some shred of human dignity, to the lack of grief or reverence for the dead.

Anna also shows that she is capable of caring and compassion in her support of Isabel and Ferdinand: "From being a little wail they dragged in off the street, I became the exact measure that stood between them and total ruin . . . for the first time in my life there were people who depended on me, and I did not let them down." Anna again demonstrates her courage and compassion as she nurses the dying Isabel. And finally, Anna's potential is revealed in her relationship with Sam Parr, one of the missing journalists from her homeland.

Fleeing a food riot during the bitter winter that follows her eviction from Isabel's flat, Anna discovers Sam living in The City's "National Library," where he is writing a book on the conditions in the city and the history of its decline: "That was how I survived the Terrible Winter. I lived in the library with Sam, and for the next six months that small room was the center of my world" (p. 107).

I thought that perhaps it was here, with the character of Sam Parr, that Austen would redeem his novel. He offers a refuge, an escape from the desperate conditions of the surrounding city. We've seen this room before, or one very like it: it was rented from a corrupt shopkeeper by Winston Smith and Julia in 1984; it was a place of temporary escape for the Handmaid and Nick, the Commander's chauffeur, in *The Handmaid's Tale*. The door into that room seems to offer a way out. Sam seeks to understand the past and offers hope for the future. When Anna becomes pregnant, something unheard of in The City, Sam tells her: "By creating a child together, we had made it possible for a new world to begin." But in the end, it proves impossible to prevent the destructive intrusion of an unaltered external reality into their refuge.

Sam is incapable of changing Anna's basic flaws. Although she assists Sam in the preparation of his book, she performs only clerical tasks—editing, transcribing, copying. There is no hint that her understanding of her world has expanded. She describes how she and Sam burn the books of the library for warmth:

I know it sounds terrible . . . but it was either that or freeze to death . . . The curious thing about it was that I never felt any regrets. To be honest, I actually think I enjoyed throwing those books into the flames. Perhaps it released some secret anger in me; perhaps it was simply the recognition of the fact that it did not matter what happened to them. The world they had belonged to was finished . . . (p. 116).

It is an innocent but unthinking blunder on Anna's part that ends the couple's brief happiness. In an attempt to buy a new pair of shoes from a black marketeer, Anna allows herself to be lured away from the Library, away from Sam . . . I understood that I had been deceived, that my visit to this place had nothing to do with shoes or money or business of any kind . . . There had been rumors circulating in the library that human slaughter houses now existed, but I hadn't believed them . . . I was able to glimpse the fate these men had planned for me. At that point, I think I started to scream" (p. 125). Anna leaps from a window to escape being butchered for the meat on her bones and falls to the street far below.

Miraculously, Anna survives her fall and is taken to the Woburn House, a shelter for the homeless and the indigent, the last of a network of such shelters established by a wealthy philanthropic physician. Now Doctor Woburn and his wealth are gone; his daughter Victoria carries on his work in the family home by selling off the last of their valuable possessions to Resurrection Agents. An island of compassion floundering amid a rising tide of human misery, her efforts are largely "symbolic—a gesture against total ruin . . . but at least people were given a respite from their troubles, a chance to gather strength before

moving on. "We can't do much," the doctor would say. "But the little we can do we are doing" (p. 132).

Anna awakens in a room at Woburn House and learns she has lost the child in her womb; worse yet, the Library has been destroyed by fire during her absence—and there is no trace of Sam. "It was a dark period for me," Anna says, "darker than any period I have ever known." Under Victoria's care, Anna eventually recovers from her injuries and is offered a position at the shelter. Grudgingly, she accepts.

Anna's reluctance is telling, and the episode only serves to reiterate her flaws, her inability to develop a wider compassion and social consciousness, or to overcome her sense of futility, her loss of hope for a better future:

The do-gooder philosophy of the place made me a bit uncomfortable—the idea of helping strangers, of sacrificing myself to a cause. The principle was too abstract for me, too earnest, too altruistic. Sam's book had been something for me to believe in, but Sam had been my darling, my life, and I wondered if I had it in me to devote myself to people I didn't know (p. 137).

Anna apparently puts little value on the care, the love that is shown her to help her recover from her injuries and losses. Victoria curses Anna back to health, and the two women afterward become lovers, offering each other solace and emotional support in the face of "the utter futility" of operating the shelter. Anna fails to understand that it is the community of the shelter's staff, their mutual caring and support, that has created an island of humanity in a sea of oppressive, lonely misery.

This point is driven home even more forcefully when Sam Parr, caretaker and broken from living on the streets, turns up at Woburn House seeking shelter. Reunited with Anna, he eventually recovers his health. But there is a stark contrast in the ways in which Anna and Sam respond to their experiences.

After Anna's disappearance and the destruction of the Library, Sam is left with nothing. He sinks into a dark pit of despair:

I gave up trying to be anyone . . . I tried to abandon my attachments, to let go of all the things I ever cared about . . . To want nothing, I kept saying to myself, to have nothing, to be nothing. I could imagine no more perfect solution than that. In the end, I came close to living the life of a stone (pp. 162-163).

But human beings are not stones, and this attempt at total withdrawal from his humanity nearly destroys him. One cannot survive alone.

Unlike Anna, Sam willingly joins in the work of the shelter, he wants to help. He comes to understand the need for human beings to share their collective experiences, to learn from them, to develop a sense of compassionate solidarity.

People responded to Sam: He had a way of listening to them that made them want to talk, and words came flooding from their mouths the moment he sat down to be with them. . . . they told him things they had never told anyone before. It was like being a confessor, he said, and little by little he began to appreciate the good that comes when people are allowed to unburden themselves—the salutary effect of speaking words, of releasing words that tell the story of what happened to them. . . . these thoughts now became part of who he was. His interior world grew larger, sturdier, more able to absorb the things that were put into it (pp. 167-168).

But this growth of understanding lies beyond Anna's reach. When Sam's reappearance brings an end to her relationship with Victoria, Anna cannot understand Victoria's response: "happiness—happiness for my sake, happiness for the fact that Sam was alive. . . ." Anna calls Victoria's dedication to her ideals and the mission of the Woburn House shelter "frightening."

Unlike Sam, Anna does not develop any sense of the value of

collective experience:

It was a different story every time, and yet each story was finally the same. The strings of bad luck, the miscalculations, the growing weight of circumstances. Our lives are no more than the sum of manifold contingencies, and no matter how diverse they might be in their details, they all share an essential randomness in their design. . . . there were times when I didn't think I could stand it anymore (pp. 143-144).

Anna never comes to realize, despite all her experiences, that it is only when people can communicate, when they share their experience and knowledge, when they overcome their own selfishness, that they are able to overcome the "bad luck" . . . the growing weight of circumstances." She never consciously makes the connection between her own progress and the altruism of others. She never realizes her dependence on the compassion and good will of others (Isabel, Sam and Victoria) who make an effort to create some sort of hope for a better world. It is this self-centered blindness to the lessons of her own experience that makes Anna so inappropriate as the central, viewpoint character of a cautionary tale.

And yet, even Anna realizes there is some value to her story. As she tells her intended reader, "I am writing to you because you know nothing. Because you are far away from me and know nothing" (p. 3). She wishes to warn her reader not to "make the same stupid mistake I did [in coming to the city]. . . . If you still have any love for me at all, please don't get sucked into that trap. . . . It's enough that one of us has been lost" (p. 183).

For a time the group is able to maintain Woburn House amid the deteriorating conditions in The City, by this time under strict martial law, eking out an increasingly meager existence on the dwindling resources of the shelter. But eventually Victoria's legacy is exhausted, and they must make a last ditch attempt to escape from the city.

And there Auster's tale ends: Anna writes her letter during the long night before their departure. The ending is left open; we have no way of knowing whether Anna and her companions succeed in their attempt to escape the city. This uncertainty bears a superficial resemblance to the conclusion of the Handmaid's narrative in Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*—with some very crucial differences.

The main portion of Atwood's *Tale*, the Handmaid's narrative, does indeed end ambiguously, and the ultimate direction of the conclusion depends largely upon whether the reader chooses an optimistic or pessimistic alternative. Atwood might have truly ended things there and left us wondering only of the fate of a single individual woman, the Handmaid. But she did not: the true conclusion of *The Handmaid's Tale* is found in the "Historical Notes" which follow the main narrative.

The "Notes" demand that the reader consider the fate of not just one woman, but many, indeed of an entire society. The reader is forced to place the work into a broader historical context, to remember the past—and to fear for the future. A close reading of the text of the "Notes," with their mild but pervasive sexist humor and innuendo, their disparagement of the importance of the Handmaid and her experiences as the central concern of the work—all indicate that the nightmare is beginning yet again, and that those who do not learn—truly learn—from the past will repeat its mistakes.

In his *Last Things*, on the other hand, Auster makes no effort to dispel the ambiguity of the conclusion. We do not even have the negative example of a carefully extrapolated dystopia, so that we might be warned of the social forces leading to its creation and avoid them—Auster's City remains a cipher. Even the incredibly pessimistic ending of 1984 accomplishes this task; the message of Orwell's painfully meticulous exploration of the psychology and methodology of totalitarianism is completely unambiguous. Nor do we have a thoughtful and inquisitive narrator exploring the meaning of the dystopian vision presented to us.

We have only surfaces. Because Anna is not given to probe beneath the surfaces of her world, in *The Country of Last Things* contains no crucial confrontations with any figures representing the social and political forces against which the novel seems to be warning. There is nothing comparable to the central, revealing encounters

experienced by Winston Smith with O'Brien in 1984 or the Handmaid with the Commander in *The Handmaid's Tale*.

In the *Country of Last Things* seems to represent a sincere effort by a talented author in an unfamiliar mode (the speculative cautionary tale) that he has not yet completely apprehended. Austier very nearly destroys the power of his novel as a potentially successful cautionary tale when, at the conclusion of her narrative, Anna denies the value of her experience altogether: "It doesn't matter if you read it. It doesn't even matter if I send it—assuming that could be done" (p. 3).

And finally:

God knows why I persist. I don't believe there is any way this letter can reach you. It's like calling out into the blankness, like screaming into a vast and terrible blankness. . . . If that is the case, then the words I am writing to you are already invisible to you. Your eyes will never be burdened by the

tinest fraction of what I have said. So much the better, perhaps (pp. 183-184)

This is a betrayal very nearly as nasty as Winston's betrayal of Julia in 1984, for it destroys all hope. Because she does not accept her experiences as significant or meaningful, Anna and her world remain unchanged. Worse yet, it places the reader of Austier's novel in an untenable position: The past having been erased, with no offer of any hope for the future, we are left with only an oppressive dystopian present, and the value of Austier's novel as a cautionary tale is debased. Remember the structure of Anna's narrative: if her letter does not leave The City, regardless of whether Anna and her companions escape, the reader is left standing amid the rubble-strewn streets, abandoned.

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Jim Young

Before the Dawn:

Weinbaum, Campbell and the Invention of Modern Science Fiction (part I)

To the memory of Clifford D. Simak

1. The Frontiers of Reality

It was a time when the future seemed somehow to have been blotted out—the age of the Great Depression, of the Dust Bowl, and the Hoovervilles. No one was sure if democracy could survive the Depression and the terrible possibility of another war, and soon enough the democracies of Europe and America would face that test. The hope that technological and political development would remake the world, so prominent in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, came to be seen as an illusion. Yet the despair so common then did not drive out creativity; the 1920s and 1930s were artistically vibrant, though some of the most interesting developments in those years remained underground, ignored or condemned by critics of the day. Jazz is the foremost example: even the tame music of Paul Whiteman was derided as "deviant" by American educational leaders. Popular literature was another such field; and science fiction was dismissed, when it was recognized at all, along with most pulp fiction.

While little enough of published in the specialty magazines of the late '20s and early '30s was of great literary merit, part of the reason science fiction received such a cold critical reception was that it postulated there would be a future. The many futures considered by the sf writers might present humanity with problems more difficult than anything known before; but nevertheless, in their buoyant, Art Deco, pulpish way, science fiction authors maintained there would be a tomorrow.

This put science fiction at odds with the literary aesthetic of the time, focused as it was on disillusionment. Consider Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1924) and Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) as prime examples of this aesthetic, since they denounce great causes as pointless: Fitzgerald depicts the American dream of financial success as Mammon, and Hemingway describes the First World War, the war to end war, as senseless. There were no science fiction writers to compare with giants such as Fitzgerald or Hemingway, of course. But authors in both the science fiction and fantasy fields were nevertheless developing new literary traditions on their own.

• • •

Without necessarily meaning to do so, the science fiction authors of the World War I era developed what later writers would use as standard plots and stock settings. There were, for example, the exotic, semi-barbaric cultures of Edgar Rice Burroughs's Mars, and post-holocaust stories by George Allan England, and the lost races of A. Merrit. In 1926, Hugo Gernsback began publishing the first science fiction magazine, *Amazing Stories*, and within a few years the field was

dominated by stories imitating the standard concepts developed for the most part by Burroughs and Merrit in *Argosy* and the other all-fiction magazines of a decade or so earlier. John Campbell and Stanley Weinbaum were the first writers who consciously rebelled against the constraints imposed by this tradition.

Consider the science fiction field in the early 1930s: The foremost short-story writers were probably David H. Keller, Murray Leinster (pen-name of Will F. Jenkins), Clark Ashton Smith, R. F. Stolz and Donald Wandrei. Keller continued writing into the late 1940s, Stolz for the most part stopped writing after 1934, even though one of the most prominent of novelists of the day, Edward E. Smith, often praised his work, and Wandrei ceased producing around 1940. Leinster was the only one of these writers who bridged the great divide between Gernsbackian and Campbellian science fiction, and who continued writing into the 1960s. Nevertheless, Clark Ashton Smith is the only one of these men still widely read today, and that mainly for his fantasy.

One reason his work is still in print is that Clark Ashton Smith was, with H. P. Lovecraft, one of the first to fuse aspects of fantasy with his science fiction. Smith's "City of the Singing Flame" (*Wonder Stories*, July 1931) and Lovecraft's *At the Mountains of Madness* (*Amazing Stories*, March-May 1936) and "The Shadow Out of Time" (*Amazing Stories*, June 1936) combine elements of cosmic displacement common to science fiction with the imagery, mood and stylistic grace found in the fantasy both men wrote for *Wonder Tales*. And in turn, Campbell and Weinbaum also drew on the fantasy tradition of *Wonder Tales* during their relatively brief careers as pioneers of modern science fiction writing. (Weinbaum hoped to write for *Wonder Tales* and Campbell even referred to himself as having written a few gothic horror stories.)

As to novelists in the science fiction world of the early 1930s, John Taine (pseudonym of Eric Temple Bell) and Edward E. "Doc" Smith were clearly the most prominent contributors to the magazines. Doc Smith, who largely developed the "super-science" story of interstellar exploration on his own, quickly became the more imitated, though Taine was by far the better writer of the two. Beyond Taine and Smith, however, there were hardly any competent novelists in the field. A. Hyatt Verrill, who wrote several novels of science-fictional adventure set in Latin America rather in the grand tradition of A. Merrit, stands out as one of the few novelists in the second ranks whose works remain readable today.

¹Robert Bloch, "Afterword. Stanley G. Weinbaum, A Personal Recollection," in Judy-Lynn del Rey, ed., *The Best of Stanley G. Weinbaum* (New York: Del Rey Books), hereinafter referred to as *Best of Weinbaum*; and John W. Campbell to Robert Moore Williams, Aug. 14, 1952, in Perry A. Chapdelaine, Sr., Tony Chapdelaine, and George Hay, eds., *The John W. Campbell Letters*, Vol. 1 (Franklin, TN: AC Projects, Inc., 1985), p. 66, hereinafter referred to as *Campbell Letters*.

Of the younger authors of those times, John Campbell first rose to prominence as an imitator of Doc Smith, and by 1932 he was established as the second-best purveyor of super-science. The other young writers who were his closest competitors were Edmond Hamilton, P. Schuyler Miller, Clifford Simak and Jack Williamson.

Isaac Asimov's *Before the Golden Age* (1974) and the first two volumes of Mike Ashley's *The History of the Science Fiction Magazine* (1975) are the best available survey anthologies of the era. But by their very nature these anthologies can not suggest how unreadable, how ill thought-out, how dreadfully unimaginative most of the science fiction published in *Amazing*, *Outstanding* and *Wonder Stories* between 1926 and 1937 really was. (Simak, for instance, abandoned writing for several years in the mid-1930s largely because he felt science fiction was too constrained a form.) It was an era when lost races abounded (as in Harl Vincent's "Tanks Under the Sea" from the January 1931 *Amazing*, where a submarine species of ape-men is ruled by a [human] communist military leader bent on returning to conquer the surface of the Earth); and when most of the aliens who lived on the (surprisingly terrestrial) planets in the rest of our solar system followed the same cultural and political habits of the most stereotyped African "natives" in the films of the day (as in "Slaves of Mercury" by Nat Schachner, *Outstanding*, September 1932—"Hilary returns to find alien diskoids in Earth's atmosphere, and Outworld lords patrolling her cities," according to the blurb); and the physical diminution or expansion of people, places and insects was one of the mainstays of the field. Ray Cummings based most of his career on this last gimmick, so there are simply too many examples to mention.

To be fair, I should add that what these stories lacked in style, characterization or sense, they often made up in vigor. What's more, occasionally they could induce a sense of wonder in the reader. Lovecraft's "The Colour Out of Space" (*Amazing*, September 1927) and Jack Williamson's "The Moon Era" (*Wonder*, February 1932) are two often-reprinted stories that epitomize this quality. I mention them here because they both achieve their effects by confronting human beings with extraterrestrials; Lovecraft's "colour" is a presence inimical to earthly life brought here on a meteorite, while Williamson's story is one of the first to show that genuine affection might arise between humans and aliens. Other writers sought to induce wonder by describing the

enormous technical achievements of the future (at which Doc Smith and the young John Campbell excelled), or through travelling to the far distant past or future or to other worlds. In short, the science fiction writers of Gernsback's era tried to create wonder by contrasting man with cosmic extremes.

...

In 1932, both Campbell and Weinbaum tried their hands at writing stories intended as a kind of protest of the overabundance of Martian princesses and the regurgitation of plots derived from Westons that became so common in the field in the early '30s.

It took two years before the stories finally went into print.

Weinbaum's "A Martian Odyssey" appeared at last in Hugo Gernsback's *Wonder Stories* (July 1934), a magazine that by that time had clearly fallen to the bottom ranks of story quality when compared to its two competitors, *Amazing* and *Outstanding*. The story stood out as absolutely revolutionary because of its crisp dialogue and the bizarre life-forms with which Weinbaum populated the Gobi-like Mars of his imagination. Gernsback was so impressed that he personally wrote the introductory blurb for the story when it appeared in the magazine.²

Weinbaum's first concern seems to have been to write and plot as well as any author who sold to the non-af pulps. This was a revolutionary step for a science-fiction writer at the time, and only a few others attempted such a feat in the early 1930s—Hamilton, Leinster and Williamson were the only major writers who regularly sold to non-af pulps at the time. In consequence, much of Weinbaum's work has aged poorly, largely because of the conventions and stylistic limitations of the pulp writing of the day. Nevertheless, he was responsible for several important innovations in the sf field: he consistently tried to achieve realistic dialogue, and sought to portray more complex relationships between men and women in a field in which the professor's daughter was the most common female character (and whose main purpose was to have the inventor's latest gadget explained to her—in short, to behave more as a prop than a person). He was one of the first of writers to create several powerful heroines—the Red Peri and Black Margot, for instance—and wrote a series featuring a husband-and-wife team of interplanetary explorers, the Ham and Pat Hammond stories.

Weinbaum wrote at a time when genre writers began to place female characters in the sort of roles they had never played before. For example, Catherine L. Moore began publishing the first major series of fantasies featuring a heroine, Jirel of Joiry, in the October, 1934 number of *Weird Tales*; and in the mystery field, Dashiell Hammett created one of the first husband-and-wife detective teams, Nick and Nora Charles, in his 1934 best-seller, *The Thin Man*. Nick and Nora Charles soon became mainstays of a series of movies; but that series represents only one facet of the enormous expansion of women's roles in U. S. films and popular literature in the 1930s (a subject unfortunately beyond the scope of this essay).

Probably Weinbaum's greatest contribution to the field remains his creation of extraterrestrial biomes and the distinctly non-terrestrial life-forms that he imagined evolving within them. Space exploration has long since made it clear that none of the planets closely resembles the conditions of which Weinbaum wrote, but his technique of building a planetary ecology filled with inter-related species of distinctly non-terrestrial form and non-human psychology became his hallmark. The sf field has never been the same. (This achievement is even more remarkable if you consider that ecology was not a concept generally taught at that time in the U. S., when most of the re-search in the subject was conducted by German biologists, indeed, the word entered English from the German.)

Campbell, on the other hand, adopted the pen-name "Don A. Stuart" (from his first wife's maiden name) to write what he later called stories of mood and characterization. Aside from a few stories dealing with new inventions, most of the Stuart stories attempt to link science fiction with the mythic, seeking to inspire awe by travelling to the end of time ("Twilight"), or by depicting cultures that have evolved beyond

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²According to Julius Schwartz, private interview held during the World Science Fiction Convention, Boston, Sep. 3, 1989.

what is presently understood as civilization ("Forgetfulness"), or by portraying a battle with a modern Proteus from another world ("Who Goes There?").

From the very first of them, "Twilight" (written in 1932 without expectation of ever having it published³), Campbell set out to show that technology would be humanity's final bequest to a universe much greater than itself, its machine descendants waiting to serve mankind even after men and women have died off. "Twilight's" tone is decidedly Wellsian rather than Gernsbackian, evidently drawing on the sequence in *The Time Machine* in which the Time Traveller voyages to the end of the Earth. Campbell sought to take issue with *The Time Machine* in its own language, for his time traveller learns that technology unified mankind by the elimination of work, rather than producing two separate human species as in Wells's vision—Morlocks descended from laborers and Eloi from the elite.

All through the Stuart oeuvre, Campbell explored technology with the creative power of the universe. In two series of novelettes, "The Machine" and "The Story of Aesir," technical discoveries serve as a kind of magic, forcing both cultural and physical evolution on the human population in the first series, and creating a cloak of invulnerability that allows mankind to win independence from alien rule in the second. And in Campbell's most famous story, "Who Goes There?", the alien dug out of the Antarctic ice is the embodiment of technical mastery of the universe—it is a shape-change capable of invading and controlling individually all living beings as though it were a virus, and carries with it the knowledge of how to control gravity and atomic forces. For Don A. Stuart, technical achievement was the means through which intelligent life could transcend its confinement on a single planet or in a given bodily form, or from the constraints of another, dominant intelligence, in short, technology was a transforming power that, as in "Forgetfulness," could change men so that everything techniques had once accomplished could be achieved through thought alone.

...

Within the space of a few years in the mid-1930s, these two men succeeded in outlining the boundaries of modern science fiction. The new borders were very different from the Gernsbackian "scientific-fiction," however—neither as naively optimistic nor as concerned about the details of super-scientific invention as earlier magazine science fiction. Both Campbell and Weinbaum succeeded in writing of what more rounded characters, with more original plotting and better rendered settings than any that had appeared in the sf pulps before them. Yet much of their writing remains marred by either dated or pseudo-archaic dialogue, and their narrative styles are often inadequate to convey the poetic moods they sometimes sought to create. Both men nevertheless showed steady improvement as writers during their short-lived careers—not surprising considering that Campbell was in his mid-twenties and Weinbaum in his early thirties. Yet Weinbaum demonstrated greater potential as a stylist: His last-written story (finished shortly before his death in December 1935), "Dawn of Flame," achieves a distinctive pastoral, lyric quality reminiscent of Thomas Wolfe, unfortunately marred by the insertion of Gernsbackian footnotes that provide a few details of future history. Such a stylistic accomplishment was unique in the science fiction field up to that time (though Clark Ashton Smith and C. L. Moore rivalled it in *Weird Tales*).

Campbell never achieved such a stylistic success. "Who Goes There?" is probably his best Stuart story because of its skillful combination of elements from the science fiction, fantasy and mystery genres—the plot is essentially a matter of technical problem solving, but it involves considerable detective work by the main characters, and it concludes with a successful fight with a shape-changing creature, a Proteus from another world. In so far as it tries to depict a life-form very different from mankind, "Who Goes There?" is reminiscent of Weinbaum, but its underlying thematic spirit is quite different. To Weinbaum, the universe was essentially outé, though not necessarily unfriendly. There was never a stranger yet more friendly alien than the ostrich-like "Tweel" of "A Martian Odyssey." But to Campbell, the universe was more vast than mankind could know—impersonal,

uncaring, awesome—in short, Wellsian, and humanity had to conquer it or be vanquished.

Both men were obviously heading in different directions as writers. Where Campbell seems to have been most concerned with using technological and social change as the underpinnings for plot and character in a story, Weinbaum seems to have been more concerned with playing off the alien and the human. For instance, in Weinbaum's superman novel *The New Adam* (1939), the central character is simultaneously human and something more, and the internal struggle this dichotomy produces is the driving force behind the story-line. By contrast, throughout the Stuart stories culture is pitted against culture, or civilization is engaged in a struggle with time itself.

If they had continued to write—if Weinbaum had not died of cancer at 33, and had Campbell not gotten the editorial job at *Astounding*—it's safe to say they would have continued to evolve as writers. Campbell would probably be known for several of the stories he asked others to write during his tenure as editor (for instance, "All," published posthumously, is a version of Heinlein's *Starb Column* written sometime during the late 1930s); and Weinbaum might be most famous for a post-holocaust future history series beginning with "Dawn of Flame."

Despite their differences in approach and in spirit, both men succeeded in opening up a new world. It would be up to others to bring it more fully to life.

2. Weinbaum and the New Ecologies

Edmond answered, "But half of me stands overlooking since half of me struggles in the stream of life wherein I cast myself."

—From *The New Adam*⁴

Stanley Grauman Weinbaum was born in Lexington, Kentucky in 1902, but lived most of his adult life in Milwaukee. He attended the University of Wisconsin, worked first as an engineer and then as manager of a movie house, married, and in 1935, died of cancer of the throat. In an autobiographical sketch apparently written in the first months of the year of his death, he wrote that he had read science fiction since childhood, and that his literary career began with his work on the *Wisconsin Literary Magazine* at college. During the early 1930s he sold a romance novel to a newspaper syndicate, and probably wrote two other novels about the same time, *The New Adam* and *The Dark Other* by Jekyll-and-Hyde story first published in 1950.

Finally fed up with the colored rays and shrinking people and stereotyped alien invaders, Weinbaum wrote "A Martian Odyssey" in 1932. It went the rounds of the magazines before it finally sold to *Wonder* in 1934, and I can't help but think its publication may have been delayed by the collapse of the Clayton Publishing Company and *Astounding's* subsequent suspension for six months in 1933.

Weinbaum's view of science fiction was at odds with the Gernsbackian tradition. In describing his beliefs about writing, Weinbaum wrote that science fiction, unlike Westerns or romances or adventure stories, was the ideal medium to "... criticize social, moral, technical, political or intellectual conditions." ... His critical standards were also different from that of Gernsback—or for that matter, of the pulps in general, he stated he thought science fiction "... is, or at least ought to be, a branch of the art of literature, and can therefore quite properly argue, reject, present a thesis, proselytize, criticize, or perform any other ethical functions."

Though he is today best remembered for his remarkable aliens, social criticism remained the underlying goal of his work. The first indication of this effort appeared in his second published short-story, "Valley of Dreams" (*Wonder Stories*, November 1934), the sequel to "A Martian Odyssey." For in that story it becomes apparent that the crew

³Stanley G. Weinbaum, *The New Adam* (New York: Avon Books, 1969), p. 162.

⁴Stanley G. Weinbaum, "Autobiographical Sketch," in *A Martian Odyssey and Other Science Fiction Stories* (Westport, CT: Hyperion Press), p. xxviii. This collection is hereinafter referred to as *Martian Odyssey*.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. xviii.

⁶Theodore Sturgeon, "About John Campbell," in John W. Campbell, *Who Goes There?* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1955), p. 8.

of the Mars expedition includes members from a future fascist Germany, a communist France and a capitalist United States. Weinbaum used the difference in mind-sets among these characters to expand them into more than burlesque figures with funny accents. Later, in other stories, Weinbaum favorably depicted a number of non-American characters—unusual in U. S. pulp magazines of the day, where foreigners were often villains—for he apparently believed that isolation would become an historical artifact in a future United States with interplanetary travel and universal electronic communications.

However, Weinbaum's main contributions to the development of science fiction were technical. For example, he pioneered techniques for setting the scene of a science fiction story, whether it took place on another planet or in the distant future. What follows is a survey of the central ideas in his work.

Weinbaum's Unified Field Theory of Alien Life

Aboveall, Weinbaum is remembered for his remarkable settings. He was the foremost pioneer of the modern style of world-building, developing a planetary landscape and then filling it with the kinds of life-forms that would most likely evolve there. At the very end of his life, he also began to expand his technique to include the development of a future history sequence. In all this, he seems to have sought the creation of an Aristotelian unity of space, time, and action—an alien ecology, in which the setting produces the characters necessary for the story.

Consider his model of Mars, for instance: the red planet of Weinbaum's imagination exhibits characteristics the Earth may evince in the far future, its atmosphere and seas already played out. Life there has evolved along a track distinctly different from the terrestrial; though it seems to be carbon-based, it is primarily in the protist kingdom, like the Earthly *Euglena*. (Weinbaum couldn't resist throwing in a silicon-based creature that builds itself a shell in the form of a silicon dioxide pyramid.) On the other hand, he portrayed Venus as a planet that kept one hemisphere constantly facing the sun, its perihelion side a blistering tropical rain forest surrounded by a vast temperate region, its far-side a frigid realm of darkness; given what appears to be a greater range of marginal competition, its plant-life has outpaced its animal-life in the race to evolve intelligence. And Pluto, ("The Red Peri," is the frigid domain of a variety of crystalline proto-viruses with insatiable appetites for certain elements and chemical compounds.

Scientific advance has not treated the worlds Weinbaum imagined with kindness. Mars is less like the Gobi and more like Earth's Moon, Venus rotates once in about two-thirds of a terrestrial year and is a hell of sulfuric acid clouds, and not even Uranus and Neptune are as mysterious as they were in the 1930s. Nevertheless, Weinbaum's success at using them for science-fictional world building, and especially his rare inventiveness in creating alien life-forms, are part of the reason some of his work still lives.

Alien and Human Psychologies

It seems to me Weinbaum's efforts at social criticism led him to compare alien psychologies with that of *homo sapiens* in order to explore what it means to be human. For example, Tweel, the ostrich-like alien of "A Martian Odyssey," is distinctly unhuman, yet he is able to grasp the rudiments of English and express concepts of danger and comparison with just a few words, a feat the narrator of the two stories, the American explorer Jarvis, finds he cannot duplicate in the Martian's language.

Tweel was neither a Wellsian Martian bent on conquering mankind, nor some sort of semi-barbaric heir to a decadent civilization after the fashion of Edgar Rice Burroughs. His culture had suffered serious reverses since the days when his ancestors traveled to Earth to visit the Egyptians of the proto-literate period (inspiring the Egyptians to believe in the ibis-headed god Thoth in the process). As Mars lost more and more of its atmosphere and water, Tweel's people died off, but they did not abandon scientific knowledge. Nor, for that matter, did they abandon sympathy and gratitude, the two characteristics that make it possible for Tweel to befriend Jarvis. For after Jarvis saves Tweel from one of the "dream beasts," creatures capable of projecting visions to lure their prey, Tweel makes sure Jarvis, whose aircraft has crashed, is reunited with his expedition.

There are other forms of intelligent life on Weinbaum's Mars, too, though of a very different order from Tweel. The dream-beasts, for example, can telepathically enslave creatures as intelligent as Tweel and Jarvis. Stranger yet, the barrel-chested creatures Jarvis and Tweel meet later in the "Martian Odyssey" seem to have a group-mind rather than individual sentience. As Tweel tells Jarvis in halting English, "One-one-two—yes!—two-two-four—no!" In other words, the marching barrels are capable of simple thought, not higher reasoning. Yet even this level of intelligence is quite different from the intellect of terrestrial apes or dolphins, because the barrels have no sense of individual self-preservation. Jarvis sees several of the things throw themselves into a giant trash-compactor. Only the group-mind is interested in its preservation and the maintenance of its property, and when Jarvis makes off with a source of radioactive energy in the form of a glowing crystal, the barrels attack both Tweel and Jarvis. (One of Jarvis's shipmates lands in a rescue craft just as the barrels are about to close in for the kill, and Tweel leaps to safety, leaving the humans to their own devices.)

So for Weinbaum, both animal and protist intelligence are capable of self- or group-preservation. Empathy, however, seems to have been his essential requirement for humanity.

In two very different stories, Weinbaum considered what super-human intelligence might be like. In one of the Ham and Pat Hammond stories, "The Lotus Eaters" (*Astounding*, April 1935), his characters meet up with a nearly omniscient plant whom they name "Oscar." Of an intelligence clearly superior to mankind's, Oscar is detached from many of the cares of protists or animals because "he" lacks sex (although he has a distinctly masculine affect) and has never had to hunt for food. As Weinbaum has Pat Hammond put it, Oscar is completely detached from any form of personal desire. "An animal has will, a plant hasn't. . . . Oscar has all the magnificent intelligence of a god, but he hasn't the will of a worm. He has reactions, but no desires."⁶

Moreover, Oscar has no sense of self-preservation, and is unconcerned about his own imminent demise or the eventual extinction of his people at the hands of marauding humanoids that have recently migrated into the region. Nor for that matter does he exhibit any form of empathy as did Tweel. Only the godlike or the superhuman intellect could be so detached from the cares of animal or protist existence; and to such an advanced intellect, it is clear that detachment is the only attitude consonant with the ultimate law of the universe, which, as Oscar reveals, is the law of chance.⁷

(In *The New Adam*, Weinbaum's mutant superman Edmond Hall is incapable of such detachment because he is too closely related to humanity; Hall can never reconcile his human and alien self-concepts, and eventually commits suicide as a result.)

Post-holocaust Pastorate

Towards the end of his life, Weinbaum expanded his thinking about settings to include the development of a future history. There are two pieces of what he must have intended as a series. Weinbaum's last completed novelette, "Dawn of Flame," and a novella, "The Black Flame." The former is Weinbaum's greatest stylistic achievement, but the latter is a retelling of the former and was probably completed by others after Weinbaum's death, for it is neither as well-written nor as well-plotted as most of his work.

In outline, Weinbaum's future history predicts the collapse of modern industrial civilization following world-war in the late 20th or early 21st centuries that end with biological warfare plagues called the "gray death." About 200 years after the wars' end, a group of intellectuals establish an oligarchy in New Orleans, and proceed to conquer the nearby feudal city-states that have developed throughout the Americas. The rulers of this regime also develop a means of vastly prolonging human life, and create a kind of merit-based immortality that grants longevity to those whose scientific, political or

⁶Stanley G. Weinbaum, "A Martian Odyssey," in *Martian Odyssey*, p. 22.

⁷Stanley G. Weinbaum, "The Lotus Eaters," in *Martian Odyssey*, p. 235.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 233.

artistic accomplishments merit it. By the year 846 of this relatively beneficent oligarchical Empire, the immortals have succeeded in creating a world state.

In "Dawn of Flame," Weinbaum tells the story of Hull Tarvish, a young man from the Ozarks who takes part in the battle of a midwestern city-state against the march of the imperial forces from the south some 300 years after the world wars. He first sees the Empire's two immortal leaders, Joaquin Smith and his beautiful sister Margot, in a battle. Despite himself, Tarvish falls in love with Margot. Later, when he meets her, Margot toys with the young man, and she is thus revealed as a woman detached from the mortals around her—arrogant, convinced of her superiority, yet unable to love anything or anyone because of her immortality, and intimately worried by it. Black Margot is presented in bas-relief; she never becomes more fully rounded because Weinbaum never reveals her thoughts to the reader. As it was, even such depth of characterization was unusual in pulp writing. For the story revolves about her growing estrangement from the human race because of her immortality, and since she is troubled by this estrangement, her problem becomes the crux of the story.

Only in *The New Adam* had Weinbaum succeeded in creating a story based so thoroughly on character, and never before had he succeeded in sustaining such consistent tone appropriate to the story. Weinbaum managed to avoid the fake archaism that still plagues post-holocaust science fiction stories (and that John Campbell had problems with to the end of his days as a writer of fiction), yet he manages

to infuse the voice of a future non-industrial age into his narrative; consider this passage from the opening of the story:

He [Tarvish] passed the place where the great steel road of the Ancients had been, now only two rusty streaks and a row of decayed logs. Beside it was the mossy heap of stones that had been an ancient structure in the days before the Dark Centuries, when Ozark had been a part of the old state of Missouri. The mountain people still sought out the place for squared stones to use in building, but the tough metal of the steel road itself was too stubborn for their use, and the rails had rusted quietly these three hundred years.¹⁹

Weinbaum died within weeks of finishing "Dawn of Flame," but in the 18 months of his publishing career, he had managed to show how science-fictional settings could be developed—either on other worlds or in the future, and how alien and human characters could be evolved from those settings. That was ground-breaking work. Then, at the very end, he achieved a unity of style, character and plot that remains rare in the field today; despite the unfortunate footnotes breaking up the story, "Dawn of Flame" still stands favorably in comparison to several of the most popular works of Asimov and Heinlein. ▶

Jim Young lives in Silver Spring, Maryland. This article will continue in the next issue.

The Wall Around Eden by Joan Slonczewski

New York: William Morrow, 1989, \$ 18.95 hc, 288 pp.

reviewed by Frank Dietz

Joan Slonczewski is an excellent world-builder, as her previous works *Still Forms on Foxfield* (1980) and *A Door into Ocean* (1986) demonstrated. Her greatest strength has been the sense of strangeness that the colorful settings of her novels evoked. While many science fiction novels unfortunately fail in constructing credible alternate species and ecologies, Slonczewski's mysterious Commensals and the ocean-dwelling women of Shora are notable exceptions.

In her latest book, Slonczewski has merged the theme of alien encounter with the familiar post-apocalyptic scenario. The small town of Gwynwood in Pennsylvania, settled mostly by Quakers (as in *Still Forms on Foxfield*, Slonczewski's Quaker background plays an important role here), has survived the global nuclear holocaust and the ensuing nuclear winter due to an "airwall," a dome of pressure, that mysterious aliens constructed over the town. Now, two decades later, the people of Gwynwood, as well as the inhabitants of the few other settlements surviving under airdomes, still do not know whether it was the aliens who started the war. Everyday life is harsh, food supplies precarious, and mortality is high. The land outside the airwall is a desert, and the wall of bleached bones around the dome serves as a grisly reminder of the many people who failed to enter the town before the wall sealed it off from the outside world.

Besides the wall, there are two symbols of the aliens' presence: the angelbees and the pylon. Angelbees are floating, gas-filled creatures that seem to observe everything that goes on in the town. The mysterious pylon in the center of Gwynwood is protected by its own miniature air dome and serves as a means of communication with the other settlements, as well as the alien masters. The survivors of the nuclear war have accepted the inevitable and are mainly concerned with the immediate problems facing the settlement, such as radioactive leakages. The younger generation, however, refuses to tolerate the paternalism of the unknown alien masters. Isabel Garcia-Chase, a young woman born shortly after the war, attempts to solve the mystery of the angelbees by entering the pylon.

The wall around the town of Gwynwood not only protects the inhabitants from most of the radiation, but also imprisons them. Isabel quotes appropriately from Le Guin's *The Dispossessed*: "Like all walls, it was ambiguous." The image of the wall appears on several levels. The wall around Gwynwood not only evokes the one built around paradise after the fall of mankind, but also represents the many divisions between

the members of the community itself. While some people see the rule of the aliens as a deserved punishment for the hubris of humanity, others, like Isabel or the blind schoolteacher, Becca, regard the protected existence of the survivors as a kind of slavery. Like Shevek in *The Dispossessed*, Isabel begins to unbuild walls, first metaphorically, then literally. When the town learns about an attempt of the Sydney underground to blow up part of the airwall around that city, Isabel decides to risk escape. She succeeds in entering the pylon, which turns out to be a gateway to artificially constructed alien environments. Isabel and her husband, David, find themselves in an idyllic garden which seems to be on the inside of a spherical satellite. There they also meet Becca, who had disappeared earlier from Gwynwood.

The second image cluster in the novel relates to the act of seeing. The angelbees appear to see the world mainly through infrared light, and after taking Becca to the satellite garden, enable her to see the world through their eyes. Isabel figures this out, and her attitude towards the angelbees begins to change. She realizes that the angelbees, as well as the robot-like "keepers" of the garden, are specialized sub-species of an insect-like hive community. After Becca's death and the birth of Isabel's baby, she and David manage to return to Gwynwood, and the remnants of mankind enter into a freer, but uncertain future.

The Wall Around Eden is Slonczewski's best book so far. It succeeds in avoiding the clichés of post-apocalyptic fiction. We find neither the brawny heroes engaged in a Darwinian struggle for survival (except for some members of the Sydney underground movement), nor is the book a post-nuclear pastoral which revels in the destruction of the wicked city. The people of Gwynwood, particularly Isabel and her friend Peace Hope, are believable characters in an extreme situation. Slonczewski depicts both the social pressures of a small, isolated community and the enormous pressure that the memory of the nuclear holocaust exerts on the survivors and their children. Most of all, she has succeeded in treating complex moral issues without heavy-handed sermonizing. ▶

Frank Dietz lives in Austin, Texas and teaches at the University of Texas in Austin.

¹⁹ "Dawn of Flame," in Stanley G. Weinbaum, *The Black Flame* (Reading, PA: Fantasy Press, 1948) p. 9.

Screed

(Letters of Comment)

Alexel Panshin, Riegelsville, Pennsylvania

I was pleased to see Charles Platt speaking up to Agis Budrys. After reading both Corydon and Hubbard, Jr., and Russell Miller on the subject of L. Ron Hubbard, I perceive in both books a portrait of the same man, a picture that looks like a more detailed version of what I had read and heard of Hubbard elsewhere. I certainly haven't seen comparably complete and well-documented work that contradicts this picture, or even modifies it particularly. I'm frankly embarrassed to see Ayjay Budrys—an sf writer far more distinguished than Hubbard—lauding him as a giant of science fiction and accusing his biographers of prejudice, as though he were Budrys's disinterested observer and critic, while not bothering to make clear the degree to which he is a paid advocate of Hubbard and his interests. As a graying idealist, I wonder what I am to make of Budrys, and of the elder statesman of sf who once told me that I should not believe a single word L. Ron Hubbard ever uttered but who now takes the Hubbardite dollar and does their work?

I was less pleased by DGH's reply to the letter of Sr. Gouvêa. Surely he could have said that our chapter on van Vogt's early work in *The World Beyond the Hill* is backed by something like 125 reference notes which you chose not to print, including a book of recollections, an autobiographical essay, unpublished essays by van Vogt, and letters from van Vogt to us, rather than leaving the impression here and after the Platt letter that our book was undocumented. If we were to be asked if we thought we had said that all could be usefully said about van Vogt, we would have to answer, "Not by a long shot." But what we do say is our best attempt to gather information and attempt an integrated view of the man and his work.

If any reader of our book doesn't find sufficient documentation in these quotes, and these various sources treated as our primary bibliography, and needs to know the source of some fact, we will do our best to answer anyone who cares to write c/o Elephant Books, RD 1, Box 168, Riegelsville, PA 19077. And if anyone has information we lack or can help us correct our errors and get the story of sf a little more right than we now have it, we would be grateful for that, too. Without the help of people who corrected our errors or told us some crucial fact or walked up to us out of the blue at a convention and handed us some vital piece of old mimeography, we might still be trying to write the story of science fiction and shoveling out waste paper by the ton. It really is a communal story, and the better the information that Cory and I have, the better the story. There is another book to be done on the more fantastic and less apparently scientific roots of contemporary sf, and we need all the help we can get. Thank you.

Scott A. Cupp, Garland, Texas

Just finished the Panshins' book. Really remarkable research and thought. Fascinating reading. Hopefully, the excerpts in *NYRSF* will stimulate sales/conversation. Again, thanks for keeping literate sf alive.

David Lunde, Forestville, New York

As I read Mr. Bailes' comments on my review of Vance's *Araminta Station*, I found myself more puzzled than anything, until I realized that Bailes and I seem to have a basic disagreement about the protagonist and about the degree of Vance's impartiality toward the various social groups on Cadwal. Bailes' final remark, however, left me feeling pretty "choked" myself. He says "... it makes me nervous to contemplate a crop of university students being given Jack Vance as an example of an insightful, empathetic contemporary social philosopher." Well, heck, that might make me nervous, too, but I don't know where Bailes gets this idea; I certainly never said anything like this in my review. I think Mr. Bailes has noticed that I am a college professor and extrapo-

lated a bit from that. The thrust of my review was that dealing with such social issues was unusual for Vance and therefore noteworthy ... not that he was an outstanding social philosopher.

Bailes' other comments raise a more serious issue. If I read him correctly, he is accusing Vance of holding racist attitudes which are displayed in his presentation of the Yips. I had said that I thought Vance's presentation of the various social groups and their different points of view was impartial, by which I meant that none of these groups was presented as having a monopoly on positive attributes. There are good and bad things shown about each. I think that Bailes' and my disagreement hinges on our perception of the protagonist, Glawen Clattuc, whom Bailes sees as "... a 'conservationist' who bravely carries the Whiteman's Burden. He heroically rescues the novel's 'native rights advocates,' who turn out to be universally befuddled or unscrupulous." I think that this view of Glawen is incorrect and leads Bailes to misinterpret other things in the book as well. Glawen is a young man in the process of achieving adulthood through painful experience. He is intelligent, clever, perceptive, honest, and forthright. He has grown up in Araminta Station and has had no reason to question its values and assumptions. Then his friend is murdered, almost certainly by someone he knows well, and he learns that other members of his family have been plotting to keep him from becoming a full citizen. After these shocks, he begins work as an investigator for the local equivalent of a police force. That job allows him to come into contact with representatives of the various political and social groups and their overt and covert machinations. By this means Glawen is made to question those values mentioned previously. The story is about loss of innocence through heavy doses of unpleasant reality. But Glawen is not a 'conservationist' or anything else at present: he is trying to figure things out and decide among differing points of view. It is Glawen who sees the people Bailes mentions as "befuddled and unscrupulous." He does not rescue them because he approves of them, but because it is his duty as a policeman.

And while a number of Aramintans and Stromans make racist remarks about the Yips, Glawen does not, and I certainly don't think it is fair to assume that Vance shares the attitudes of characters in his books. Consider the fact that when Glawen goes with a group of young men to a whorehouse in Yiptown (Glawen goes because he

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is on an undercover mission), he spends his time with a prostitute having tea and asking her about her life. Glawen is trying to understand his society, his world, his universe, but I don't think that he has come to firm conclusions by the end of this book. His attitude is skeptical and critical towards everyone.

[DGH: The question of the extent of identification between the writer and the text is a thorny one, the root of more than a century of critical discussion. But readers care about it more passionately than critics. Illusory or not, readers in general would like the writer to project an agreeable self-image through the work. This is something that Jack Vance, in particular, has always rejected. He has discouraged biographical discussion, or the publication of photos, wishing the work to stand alone, on its merits, in opposition to say, Robert A. Heinlein or Samuel R. Delany.]

Patrick D. Murphy, Indiana, Pennsylvania

I believe James Gunn's explanation of the intended meaning of his sentence in the McIntyre entry, but find the appeal to the "comma" as a guarantor of a singular meaning somewhat dubious. A sentence structure such as "Like McIntyre's *Superluminal* it is feminist but not polemical" would make the remark unambiguous in terms of whether or not the reference to *Superluminal* links it with *Dreamsnake* or with "polemical," but it leaves unresolved the purpose for introducing the word "polemical." If no contrast is to be inferred, why introduce the concept into the sentence at all? It seems utterly superfluous, unless Gunn is concerned some people might associate "polemical" with "feminist"; or does he want the reader to recall his only other use of it, when he applies it to Russ? Does this suggest a problem? Not if the word "polemical" has no connotations.

This possible problem ties in with Gunn's point: I claimed he used the word pejoratively. His appeal to a dictionary to demonstrate that he used it only "descriptively" is either naïve or disingenuous. Dictionaries provide a limited range of meanings of words, without addressing context and, necessarily, without including all of the meanings of a word in use at any given time. Thus Gunn provides a non-contextual denotative definition. But what of possible connotations; consider the following sentence: "The *Female Man*, 1977, marked Russ's transition from a writer of sensitive, skillful feminist sf such as *Plonk on Paradise*, 1968, and *And Chaos Died*, 1970, to the polemicist for feminist perspectives." As I read this sentence, the concept of polemical is counterposed to "sensitive, skillful." Are these terms also simply "descriptive," or do all three indicate value judgments in the specific context of Gunn's sentence and Gunn's article? John Pierce's letter indicates that the word "polemical" does connote, at least for him, something negative, i.e., "a sense that there is only one Truth," thereby contradicting Gunn's claim about the simply "descriptive" character of his word choice.

In response to my passing remark about *Herland* being read more now than *She*, Gunn replies that "whether this is true or not, that wasn't the question I was concerned with, but whether *Herland* or *She* was more often read at the time of publication and more influential on the development of science fiction." Influence is not simply a linear phenomenon; *She* may have been more influential at one time, but what about influences on contemporary writers? If writers recover a neglected work, start reading and talking about it, and display its influence, then does it not deserve attention as being influential even if it was not widely read at the time of its publication?

Finally, let me speak to the term "cold certainty." Is this another "descriptive" use of language? Let me just say about Pierce's letter that his remarks about polemical works strike me as extremely inaccurate in regard to *The Female Man*. What is the "one Truth" that he thinks is espoused there? I would argue that Russ's book is far more dialogical, in the Bakhtinian sense, than any of the other works he names, and suggest that he read the more recent critical texts that address Russ's book.

Alexei Panshin, Riegelsville, Pennsylvania

Having picked up the December issue at the SFWA bash last night, I set out this morning to read the third part of our van Vogt chapter—but I had to break off in the middle to drop this card to tell you that I was gassed by the editorial wit that placed John Ordover's clever review of Anthony's *Pornucopia* bunn-to-bunn with our sentence about joint efforts, movements back and forth in time, and primal explosions.

[DGH: Touché!]

Mike Resnick, Cincinnati, Ohio

I feel very flattered. I think you guys have now spent more words trashing "Kiryngya" than I spent writing it. The fact that this continues 14 months after it first saw print implies to me that it sure pushed somebody's buttons.

Still, I think you could have done a better job. After leading off last summer with some guy who thought Mozambique was Kenya, you've turned the task over to some guy who doesn't know anything about Africa, so spends most of his energy explaining why what I had to say doesn't apply to Amerinds. (After all, Amerinds and Kikuyu are non-white, non-Christian, and non-high-tech, so they must therefore be interchangeable, right?)

Look, I appreciate the fact that the story sticks in your collective craw... but if you want to do a thorough trash job on "Kiryngya," just ask me for some material on the Kikuyu. I'll be happy to send it to you.

[GVG: One text I'd like to recommend is Marjorie Shostak's *Nisa: The Life and Words of a Kung Woman* which addresses some of the issues raised by "Kiryngya."]

Conflict of Interest: A Brief Sermon

(Continued from page 24)

—What if David used a Bridge Publications bookmark while reading an anthology from a small press? Could he review it in good conscience?

—What if I was sleeping with a loaded book under my pillow by the author whose latest book Rob was going to make a pass at reviewing? What would our parents think?

—What if Greg met an author at a convention and then reviewed her latest book? Would he still be able to find crash space?

—What if I reviewed a book that was based on a story that first appeared in a magazine that published a story by a person with whom

I once had intimate relations? Would I remember?

—What if a tree falls in the forest and I review it? Does it make the sound of one hand clapping?

—What if we all reviewed books on their own merits—as we perceived them—regardless of which marketing force promoted it? Wouldn't it be nice?

It would. I think it is.

—Gordon Van Gelder & the editors

Conflict of Interest: A Brief Sermon

One of the most pressing and—if you'll forgive the play on words—depressing problems of our time is summed up by these three hideous words: Conflict of Interest. Yes, that ugly beast of publishing, whose very breath is like a whiff of Hell itself, has become a Force in our time. No one is safe. Behind every cover, beneath every title, within every editorial, there it lurks, waiting to ensnare yet more helpless victims between its metal jaws. Women, children, even small reptiles are not safe. The menace is upon us!

Brothers and sisters, what *can* we do?

In order to drive this Demon from our peaceful kingdom, we *must* educate our young, teach their open minds the perils of Conflict of Interest, lest the entire world of science fiction should sink to become a close-knit community of friends who support each other's works. This *cannot* be. YOU must help prevent this.

I have taken it upon myself to draw up the following list of questions, using we pristine members of the *NYRSF* as paragon. But beware: Conflict of Interest can happen *anywhere*. No one is safe.

Go over these questions with your children, or your editor's children, or random urchins on the streets. Ask them what they would do in these situations. Ask *yourself*. ONLY YOU CAN STOP THE SREAP OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST!

—What if I, an employee of St. Martin's Press, wrote a piece about the short fiction of H. G. Wells, even though St. Martin's published *The Complete Stories of H. G. Wells*? Would it not be conflict of interest solely because the author is deceased? If I wrote an article encompassing stories that appear in Gardner Dozois's *The Year's Best Science Fiction*, would there be conflict of interest in spite of the fact that I have no other connection to the stories themselves?

—What if Greg wanted to review a book by an author whose first two books were edited by David?

—What if David wanted to review a book on which he had not done any work, but for which he had attempted to purchase reprint rights?

—What if Kathryn agented a book by one of Rob's friends and John was the first reader for it and he liked it and David acquired it and Greg works for the company that marketed it? If I reviewed it, would I be in conflict with everyone?

—What if Rob reviewed a book that our magazine's distributor sells?

—What if John reviewed a book that he read while sitting in David's office at William Morrow? Could he type his review on a Tor typewriter?

—What if Kathryn reviewed a book that uses words that appear in one of her own short stories?

—What if a friend of John's reviewed a book copyedited by a friend of mine in the library with the revolver?

(Continued on page 23)

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